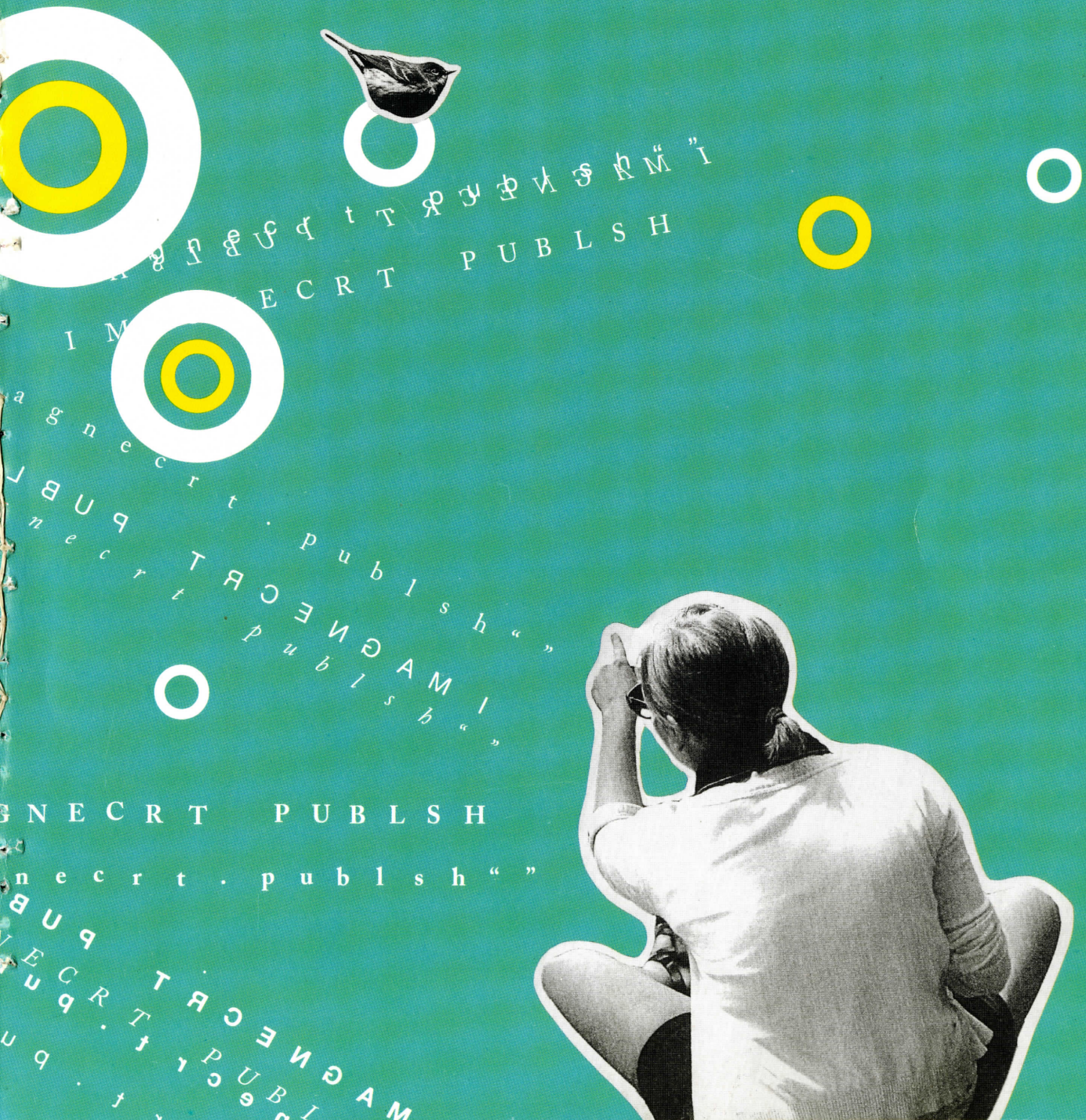
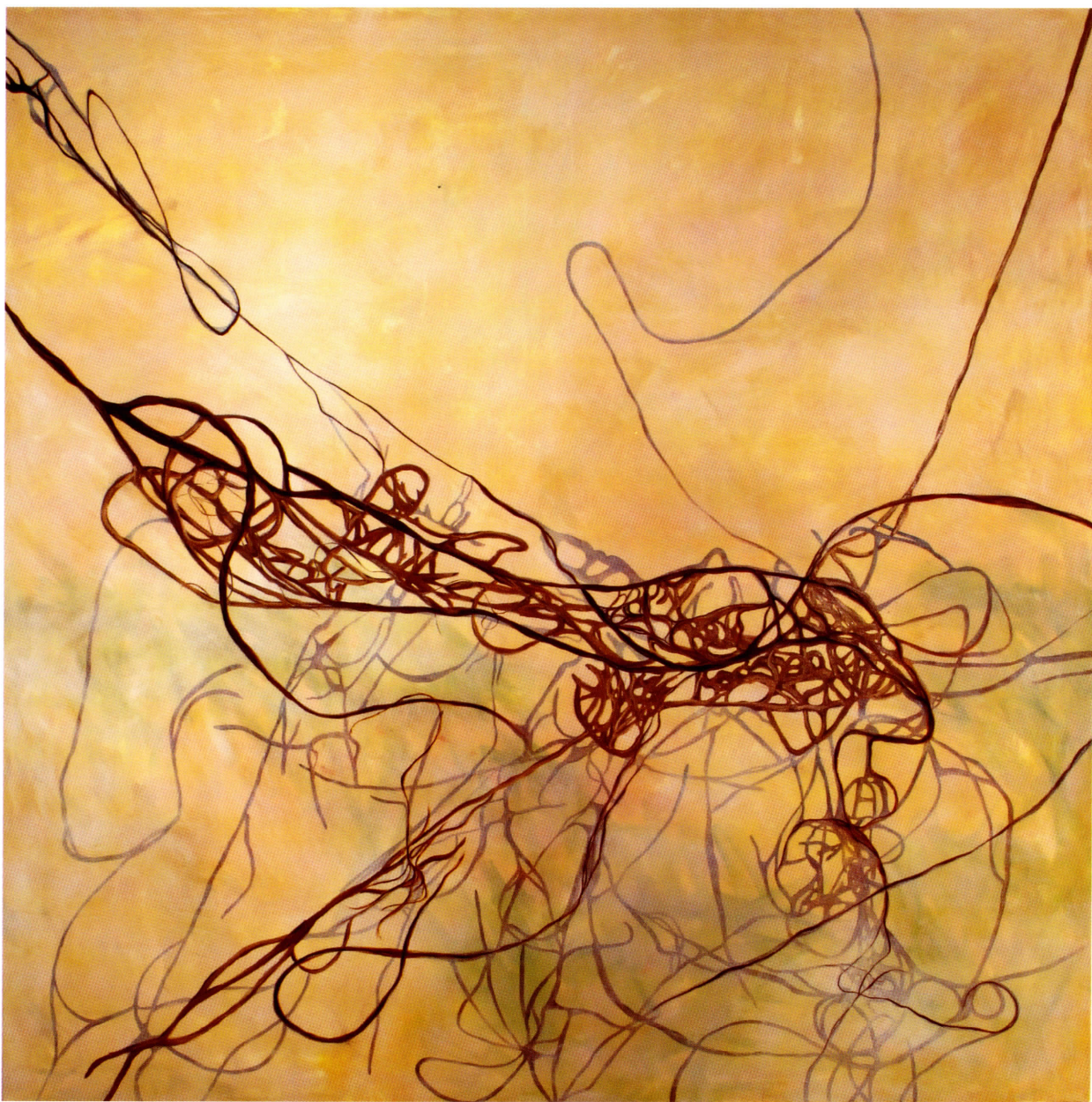


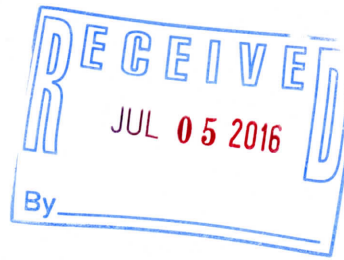
42.2 The Auburn Circle



Spring 2016

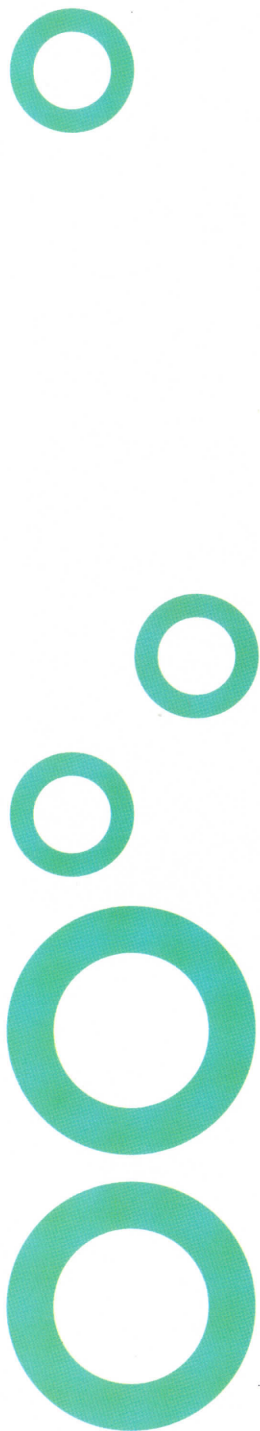


Shower Walls, Rebekah Thompson, oil paint



"Creavtity is contagious. Pass it on."

Albert Einstein



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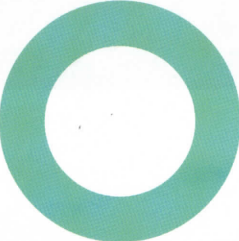
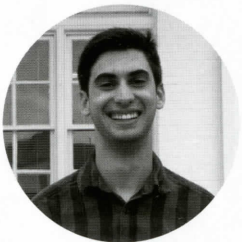
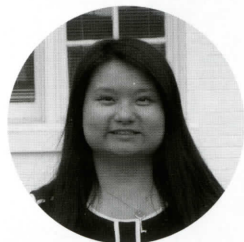
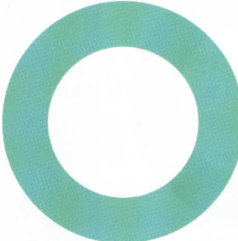
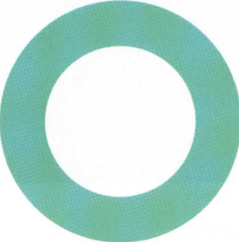
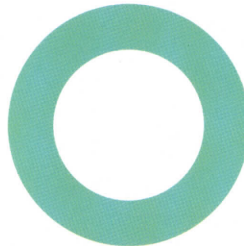
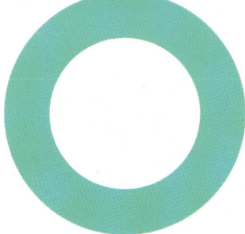
Prose.....Ande Nichols, *Section Editor*
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Sarah Citrin
MeMe Collier
Kris Martins
Stone Phillips
Keira Rich

Poetry.....Emma Hyché, *Section Editor*
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Ariel Cochran
Timothy Collier
Aaron Scobie
Katherine Tidwell

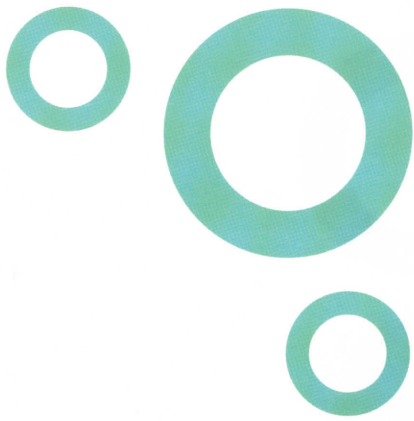
Visual Arts.....Lydia Sweeney, *Section Editor*
Rachel Beatty
MacKenzie Colton
Jackson Glass
Michelle Mandarino

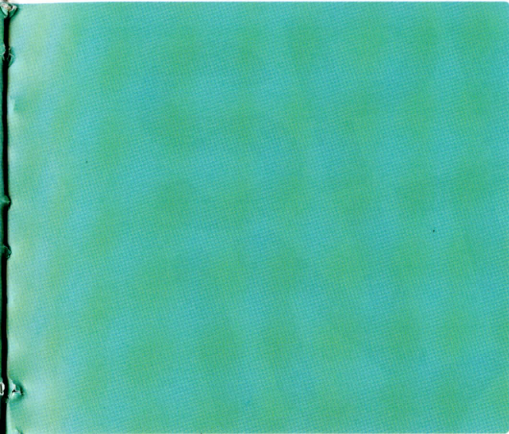
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Letter from the Editor





The epigraph on the first page of this edition of *The Auburn Circle* quotes Albert Einstein: “Creativity is contagious. Pass it on.” Since the Circle began in the 1970s, promoting creativity has been our main purpose. As Einstein suggests, creativity is like a flame that can be passed from wick to wick. If we don’t share our creativity with our communities, our flames go out. This may seem trite, but it’s also true. Every photograph, painting, poem, and prose piece in this magazine started from a spark of inspirational creativity. “White Death” by Jesse Aultman draws inspiration from Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*; Andrew Swindle’s photograph “The Space Between” reflects the aesthetic beauty of our own community; and MeMe Collier’s poem “His Response to Norman Rockwell’s *Sunday Morning*” uses imagery from a famous painting. If we didn’t expose ourselves by positioning our creative works in the sight of the public, our world would be sorely lacking in inspiration.

During this semester, the Auburn Student Media Group decided that our overarching purpose is to “[share] the Auburn story in a professional manner while creating invaluable career experiences for students.” The Circle certainly does create professional experiences for our staff members who want to go on to be writers, publishers, editors, or designers. More importantly, though, the Circle shares the Auburn story through this magazine, which holds the stories of budding photographers, aspiring writers, and expressional experimenters in between its pages. These are the stories of freshmen, juniors, and 5th year seniors—English majors, engineers, and nurses.

The Auburn Circle is the autobiography of Auburn—an avenue where all Auburn students can express themselves and share their own stories. As Editor-in-Chief, I hope that the creativity in this magazine is incredibly contagious. I hope that your friends’ and classmates’ stories will inspire you to look through the lens of a camera, pick up a paintbrush, or take a creative writing class. Inspiration leads to creation, which circles back to inspire. So no matter how you tell your story, share it with the Circle, so that we can pass it on.

Jamie McClintock
Editor-in-Chief

SPRING
INTO A

GOOD
STORY



Bluebird Explosion, Michelle Park, Nikon D5100

interstate

Poetry by Kristen Bledsoe

driving home to someone i love
alongside eighteen-wheelers who
lumber like elephants
i am dizzy with the symmetry of this world

that is continually in spring:
straight wide roads painted
in lovely sweet thick airy pinks
as day folds its envelope closed.

in speeding, rounded atmosphere,
observe a gentle particle wave of wings
rising and bending to meet and embrace the
silhouette treeline. family, migrating home.

spring: a shift north, swallowing
the fragrance of childhood honeysuckle
and all those people
on the road, and the birds, and the foothills.

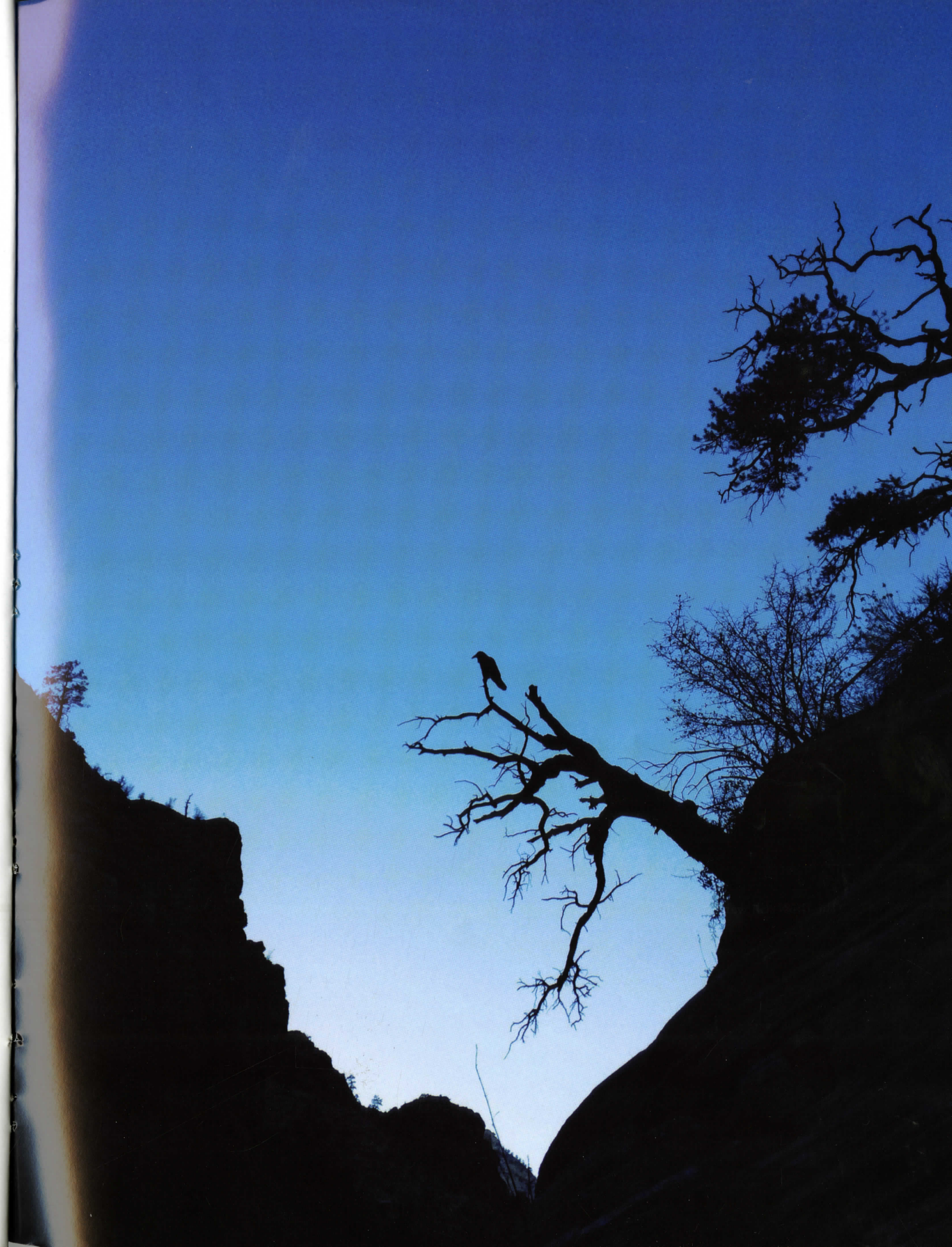
Carved Bluebirds

Poetry by Kate McCollum

When I was small, I dragged a chair
To the dresser and pulled myself up
To get a better look at
The carved bluebirds on your jewelry box,
Their glass eyes shining in the sunlight,
Which sifted past lace curtains
Like melted butter through flour.
You came, an apron tied around your waist,
And smiled to see me with a ring
On every garden-stained finger.
You asked me what I liked; I pointed;
You brought out a small, empty locket
With our initial carved on top,
And ran a length of yarn through its eye
To put around my neck,
Which dangled over a nest of eggs,
Small, delicate blue promise shells,
Hiding in your rosebushes,
Which our faces, old and young,
Peered over and smiled.

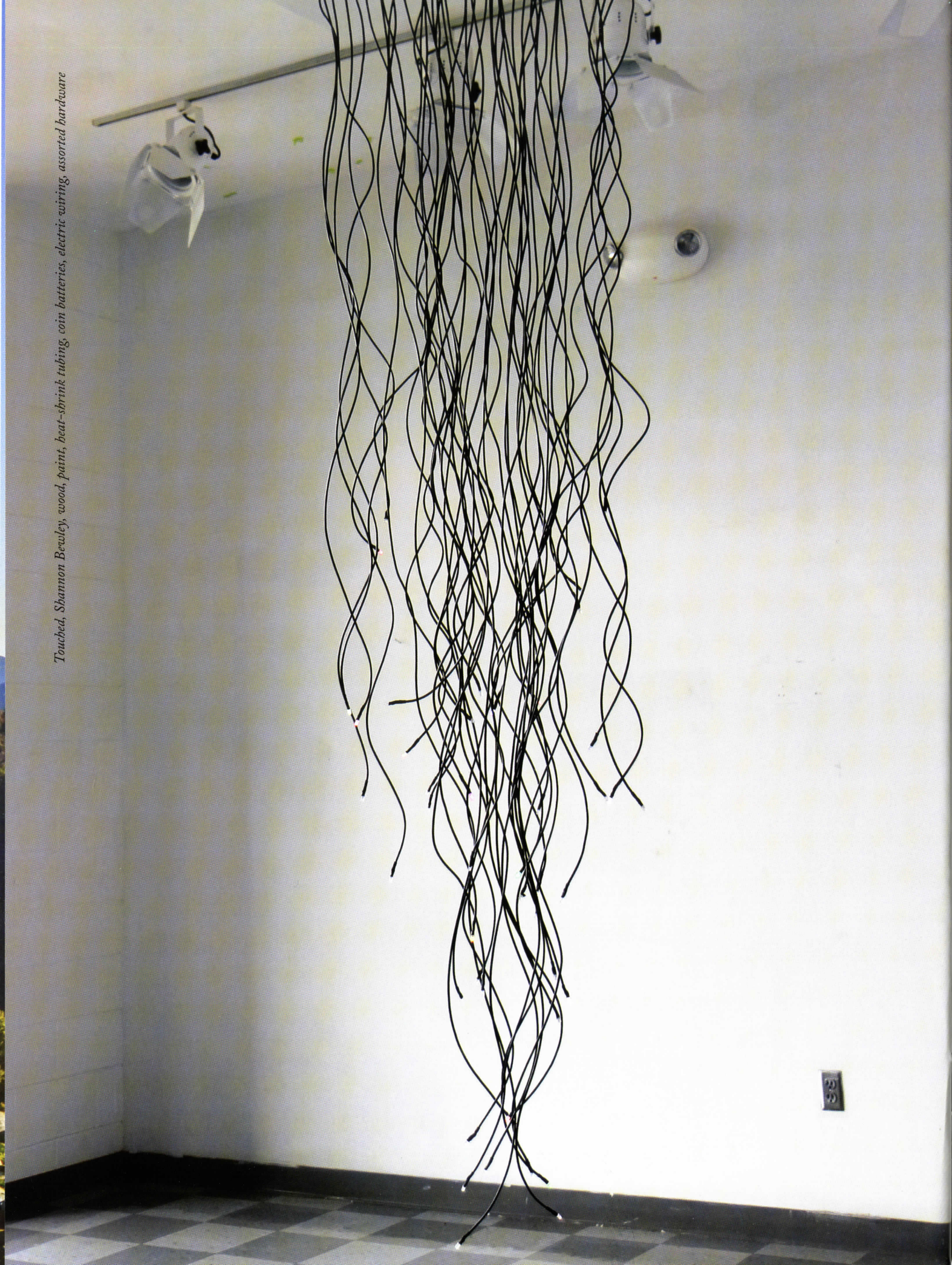
After you died,
Your daughters went through
All your things, and brought them
Out of the bluebird room, so their calling
Wouldn't echo and wake my grandfather,
And now the box stands in my room,
So far away from yours, with the bluebirds'
Glass eyes glinting dully as cooling embers
Imbedded in a tall, straight tree that fell
To the mossy earth to make this treasure casket,
Which stood so high above me long ago.
The rings still wait inside, untouched,
Though I've taken out and inspected
Old photographs, bits of broken
Shell, and love-you notes;
It was then, seeing your things apart from you,
That I began to believe
That you were really gone,
And the locket, in my own box,
Is still empty.

The Raven, MacKenzie Colton, iPhone 5s





Touched, Shannon Bewley, wood, paint, heat-shrink tubing, coin batteries, electric wiring, assorted hardware



Isola Bella

Poetry by Hannah Lupas

This place is purifying,
I tell my mother.
She cried over the phone.
Just four more weeks, I tell her.
This is good for me.

I adjust on the lumpy beach,
stones kneading the knots
in my upper back.
Breathe, breathe deeply.
Let the cool water cover
you,
and forget home.

My hair is undead,
like the chaos of worry,
ruining my head.
Wind flaps the soaking strands.
They blur about, like the jellyfish limbs
drooping this way and that
in the rowdy current.

The sound of Italian shouting
and loose melodies
in the air,
in my ears,
softens my tightened spirit,
and the breath breaks
the wall in my upper lungs.
I surrender to the sound,
and the sun on my skin,
kissing me sweetly.
I fall asleep, half naked
on the salty stones,

and I dream:
of a mop-headed boy
and his ocean eyes that I broke
and made bleed
because I cared too much.
You're better off this way.
And then his hand,
such a dear friend
with my cheek,
lashes to meet it again

and
I wake
to a bitter sting.
The dawn was setting swiftly,
and the tide rebelling against it,
and there, a translucent ribbon
clinging to my toes,
la medusa.

I cursed and flung
the gelatinous maggot
back into the sanguine waves,
and spat on my burning foot.
I scurried back
from the chilling water.
My newest fear.
It's not your fault.
It's no one's fault.
Even the tide
must have means to release
its most wicked dreams.
Just like him.
Just like me.



White Death

Fiction by Jesse Aultman

*And did you get what you wanted
from this life, even so?*

I did.

*And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel
Myself beloved on the earth.*

—Raymond Carver, *Late Fragment*

Roy Scheider's agent dragged him to a party in 1974. It's unclear what Scheider was thinking. Maybe he was overwhelmed by the number of people, or perhaps he was just eager to make a good impression. Either way, as Scheider walked through the crowd of nameless faces, his agent finally led him to a booth in the back of the party. Steven and writer Tracy Wynn sat in the booth discussing a motion picture.

"We're going to have this giant shark come out of the water," Steven said, "and land on the boat and crack the boat in half."

Tracy nodded in agreement. Before Scheider could register their conversation, he was quickly introduced and dragged away.

When leaving the party, his thoughts finally able to catch up with him, Scheider turned to his agent and said, "Those guys have got to be kidding. A giant shark that cracks a boat in half?" *They were looney.*

≈≈≈

When I was little, I was afraid to go swimming. This fear didn't stem from drowning or an inability to swim.

I was afraid of sharks.

My grandmother, sitting at the edge of the hotel pool, the Florida wind blowing the strains of her hair, and the hazy sunlight creating pockets of light in the water, said, "There's no shark." I, however, was unconvinced, and as I stood, alone, in the pool, all I could see was myself and the shark. *All three tons of him.* His fin glided above the water, moving between the patches of light. His twenty-foot frame and 240 three-inch teeth circling, circling me—as his two-foot jaws open.

The ocean turns red, and despite all your poundin' and your hollerin', those sharks come in, and they rip you to pieces.

≈≈≈

On June 20, 1975, *Jaws* was released in 465 theaters, becoming the first film to open nationwide. In its first weekend, *Jaws* grossed more than seven million dollars, and by its second, had made back its production costs. And after a measly seventy-eight days, *Jaws* dethroned *The Godfather* as the box office king, becoming the highest grossing movie of all time—making \$260 million in

just the United States (\$400 million worldwide). When Richard Dreyfuss, the actor playing Matt Hooper, walked out of the theater in 1975, he screamed from the top of his lungs, "The son of a bitch did it. He did it."

After wrapping *Jaws* early that year, Steven Spielberg was convinced he wasn't going to work in Hollywood again, and for good reason.



I was a cruel director—I realize this in retrospect: my lead actor lying under a rotted tree, fake blood gushing from his head. This was the set for a short film I directed in tenth grade, titled *Verstehen* (a film about a teenager who gets lost in the woods).

"Do it again," I said, still rolling from the previous take.

"How the hell do you want me to do it?" He had a point. This was the twenty-seventh take, and the cold air surged like a rush of below-freezing water; the last bit of sunlight subsiding behind the trees.

"I want you to do it right." There was a long pause. Internally, the entire crew was thinking about the mile hike out of the woods. I didn't budge though. Eventually, he sighed and rubbed the top of his forehead.

"Action," I said.

He tried again, overselling it. "Cut, again."

"Seriously, what do you want?"

It started to rain, the woods began to smell like mist, and no one moved from their positions as I let the camera continue to record.

We won the film festival. I went with the first take we shot, but we won.



The shark never worked. That's the general consensus from the set of *Jaws*.

"I had lost my confidence, and I had lost control of the production," Spielberg said. "I have never lost control of a production before, and not since either."

After a successful thirty-five days of shooting, everything with *Jaws* went south. The film went overbudget, costing upwards of ten million dollars. The production also went over schedule, and the producers began to pressure Spielberg, almost pushing him off the production altogether. All these problems stemmed from the same inevitability: the mechanical toy shark simply wouldn't work—they could never get it to move—and, at one point, it sank into the ocean.

Spielberg was out of a job, or so he thought, and as he sat atop the *Orca* (the boat in the film), looking out over the ocean he'd insisted on working on (instead of the nice studio tank), he saw his production fall apart and his motionless shark on the surface of the water. That's when Spielberg realized his clock was ticking—after all, he was a twenty-six-year-old nobody; his time in Hollywood was coming to an end.



I adjusted the lighting—we were setting up the scene to look like a bar (it was for a short film called *Broken Strings*). John, one of the producers and lead actor, took the stage.

"Lighting still not right?" he said as he sipped on his beer, the condensation dripping onto the floor, the low level lighting casting shadows across his face.

"No." I rearranged them again and looked back in the viewfinder. "Dammit." This had been going on for the last hour and a half, and the rest of the crew had actually left; this was mainly because we hadn't shot a single take.

"Lighting still not right?"

"No."

Significant time passed, and John lit an Asylum Dragon Milk cigar. The smoke filled the room; the charcoal smell clouding my senses.

"Lighting still—"

"No."

We lost that festival.



Spielberg had to adjust, writing extra dialogue, suggesting the shark's presence, but never actually showing it, and using different camera angles. Spielberg set out to make a B-movie, but instead made a classic by accident—all because the shark wouldn't work. The dialogue created stronger and more emotionally fulfilling character arcs, as the story was forced to center around the people, instead of the shark. The suggestion of it turned out to be far more frightening than the actual shark itself, as the opening scene features a girl being pulled over the water by an unseen figure. The underwater camera angles, showing the perspective of the shark, became the most famous angle of the film.

When I think of Jaws, I think of courage and stupidity, and I think about both of those things existing underwater.

Spielberg still has nightmares about *Jaws*—some things create scars that can't go away.



I went into my film instructor's office. It wasn't the stereotypical office with random books and movies spread out all over the shelves. In fact, the only movie he had displayed was *Annie Hall* (his favorite).

Everything I wrote that semester, I brought to him, and the majority of his office hours were taken up by one of my new or revised screenplays.

This is the last time I would see him until the fall.

I handed him *Redemption Road*, a twenty-two page script about a bounty hunter dealing with depression. The pivotal scene involves Ottinger (the bounty hunter) handing his Old Montana Red Eye Whiskey (the script was very particular about that) to his partner, metaphorically passing his struggles over, as well. It's a cycle, or, at least, that was the idea.



He glanced over the script and then set it down. He didn't say anything for a while.

"You know," he finally said, "You can take a break. It's okay to stop writing."

I walked out of his office. I still don't think I've gotten that script back.



"There were times early in the picture when we felt we had made a mistake [in hiring him] because Steven was maddeningly perfectionistic," producer David Brown said. It paid off, though, as *Jaws*, for better or for worse, changed the film industry—giving us the summer blockbuster.

Scheider met with Spielberg again after that party in 1974—he got his agent to set it up because he couldn't stop thinking about what the young director said. Once Spielberg arrived, waiving no time, Scheider immediately asked for the lead part—he got it. He knew he was part of something special.

A relationship, I think, is like a shark. You know? It has to constantly move forward, or it dies. And I think what we got on our hands is a dead shark.

—Woody Allen, *Annie Hall*

I decided I wanted to be a filmmaker when, at the age of ten, I accidentally clicked the behind-the-scenes feature on the *Jaws* DVD.

Spielberg starting talking about his nightmares.

And I stole my mom's video camera the next morning.

I replicated the shots in the film continually—over and over again—and, as Spielberg said, "I became a victim of this drug called cinema." A drug that's injected, in the veins, the moment the lights go out.

When I go swimming now, I'm no longer afraid of a shark circling. I do think of Spielberg's nightmares. He'll dream that he's back on the set of *Jaws*, and the shark begins to sink again and again to the bottom of the ocean, and with it, his career.

I still see that shark. *That's a twenty footer. Twenty-five.* And, as he circles me, I realize I'm not scared of his jaws opening, but rather, I'm scared that he'll just swim by. ○





what I should have said to my mother the day her father died

Poetry by Nathaniel Vincent

we will learn
to live
with little

live to learn
with the bones
between us

to speak
without speaking

through silent things
that make everything
around them

stir and sound

-

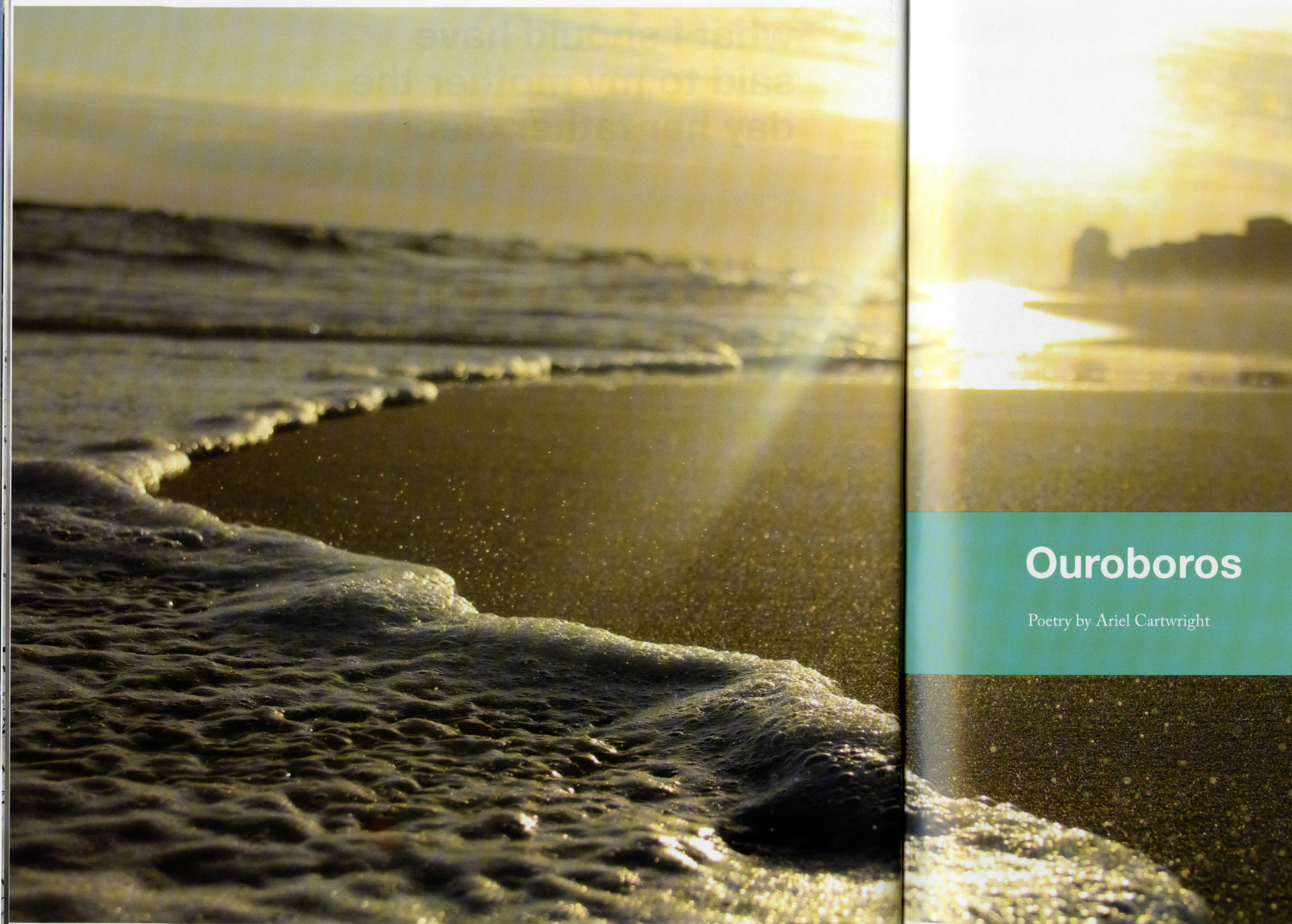
instead my brother
and I
twisted and twisted

around something
we didn't understand

speaking and speaking
until we broke

like
some stringed
instrument

tuned too tightly



Foam, Jesse Aultman, Canon 7D

Ouroboros

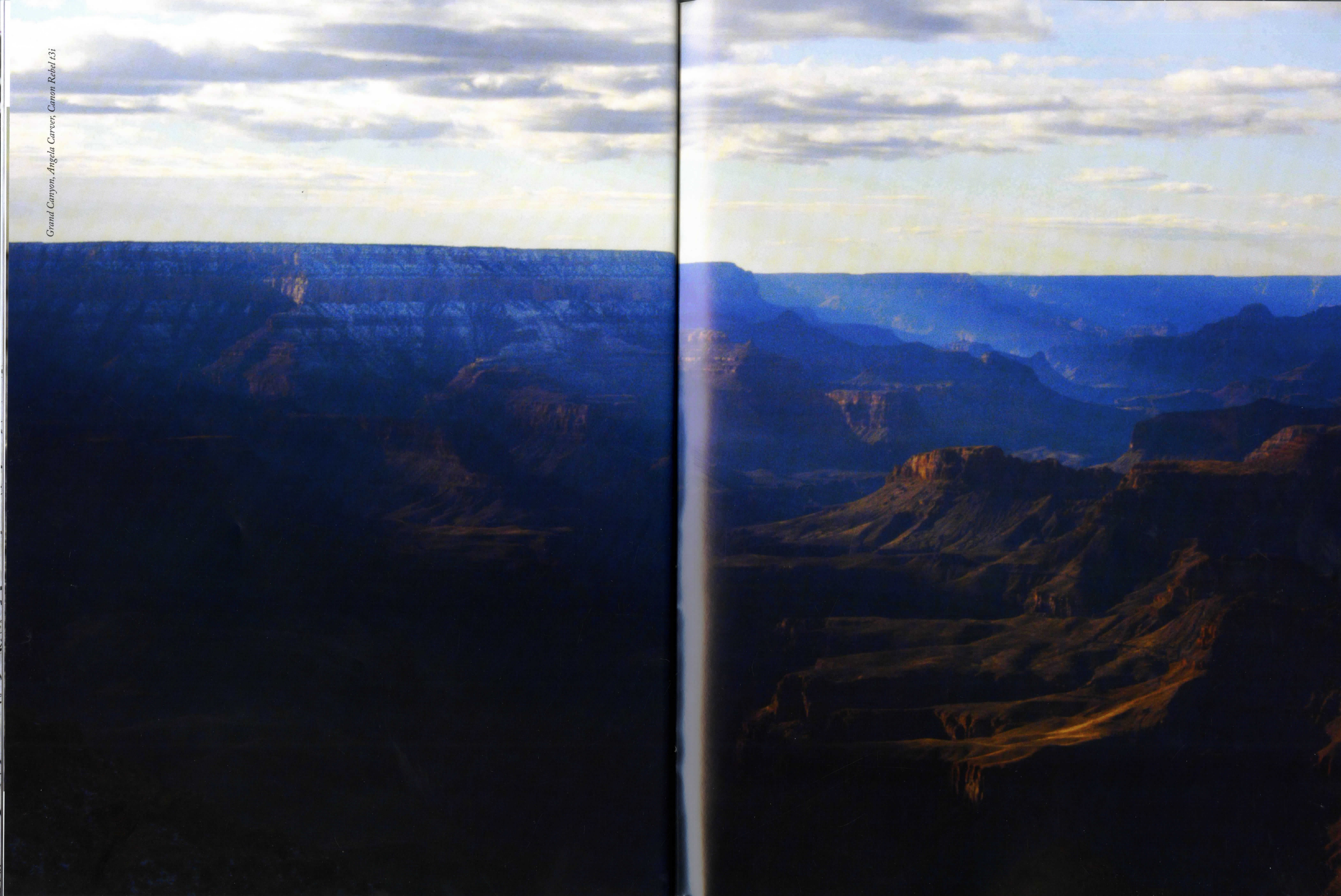
Poetry by Ariel Cartwright

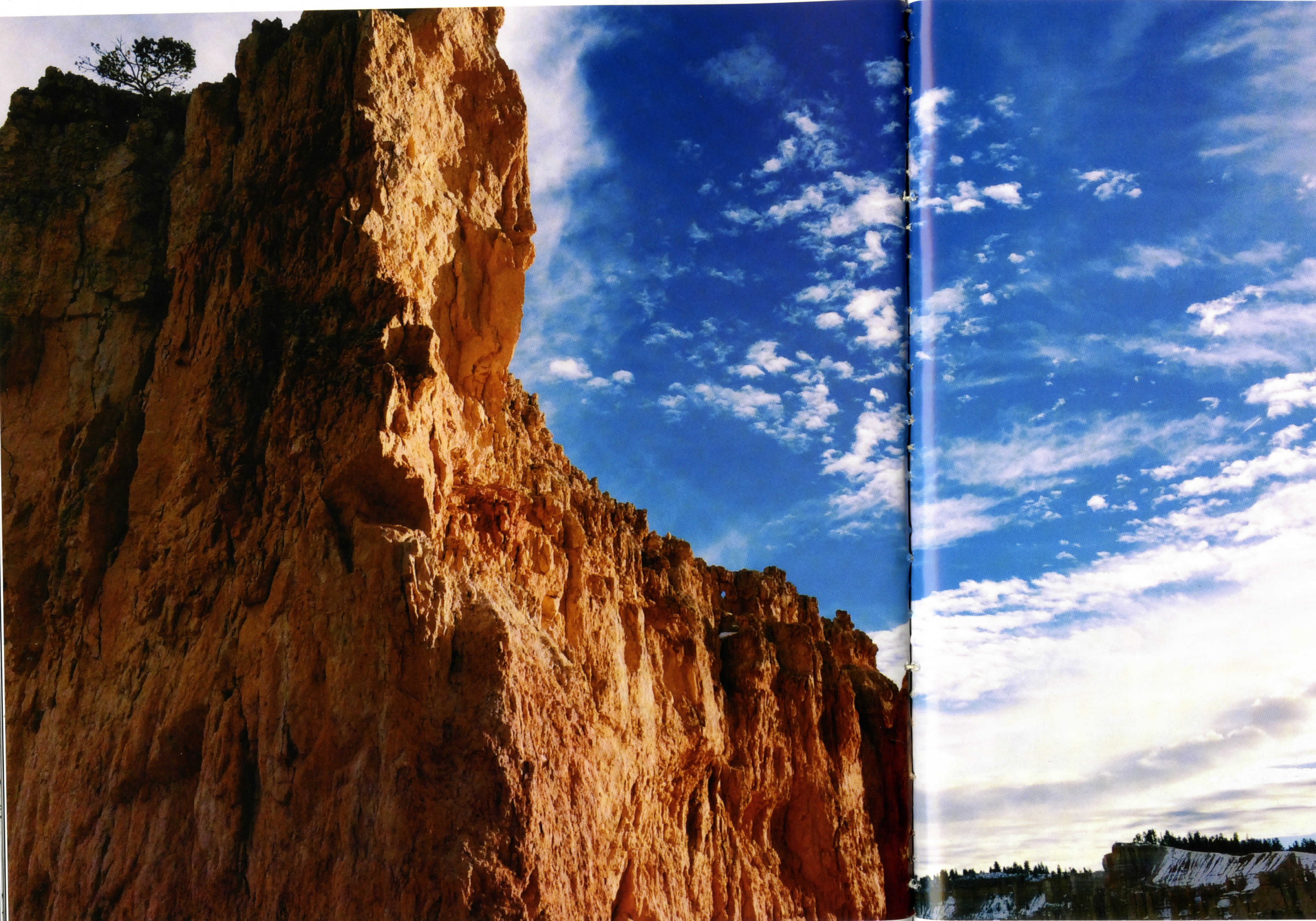
an invisible filth
in the mouth. the
hissing implosion
of the ocean curling.
the empty fullness of
midnight on a beach.
the sondering moment.
a found memory you
have no proof existed.
waking up every
morning alive and
you.

you
alive and mourning
every waking
existence. proof you
have no memory.
found sondering on a
beach at midnight. full
of emptiness curling.
an ocean of implosions.
the hissing mouth
filthy and invisible.

an invisible filth
in the mouth. the
hissing implosion
of the earth curling.
the midnight fullness of
an empty beach. the
sundering moment.
a found memory of you
having no proof existed.
waking up every
morning alive and

you
alive and mourning
waking up existing.
proof of you having no
memory. the moment
sundering. an empty
beach full at midnight.
the curling earth implodes
the hissing mouth
invisible and filthy.





Bryce Canyon, MacKenzie Colton, iPhone 5s

Spoil the Meat

Poetry by Alex Brazzell

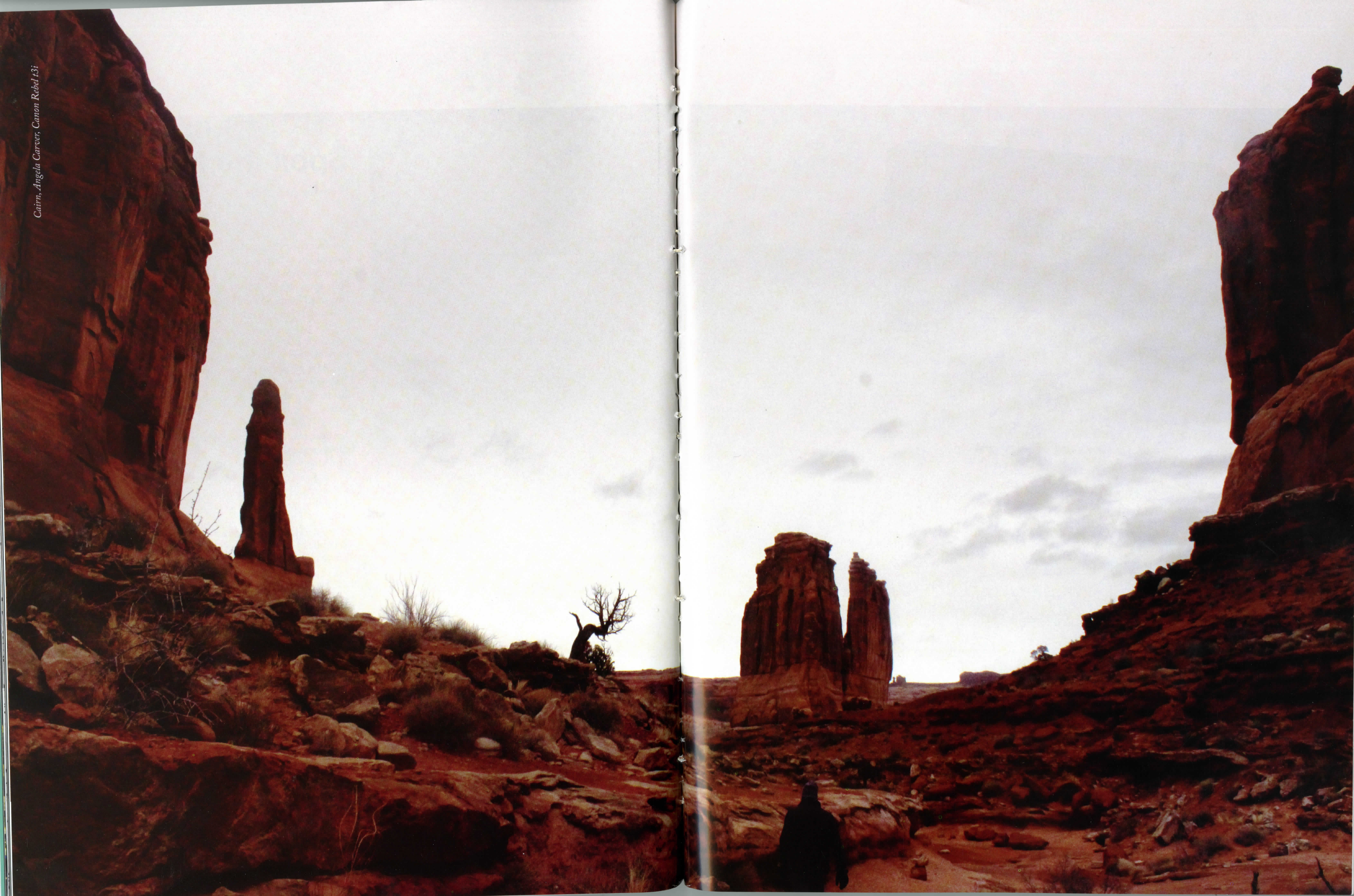
The deer chews on overly bright grass,
planted just to attract him.
His soft brown hair is dappled with fading
white spots, like a memory all but forgotten.
Two small lumps blossom on top
of his head—an idea not yet put into action.

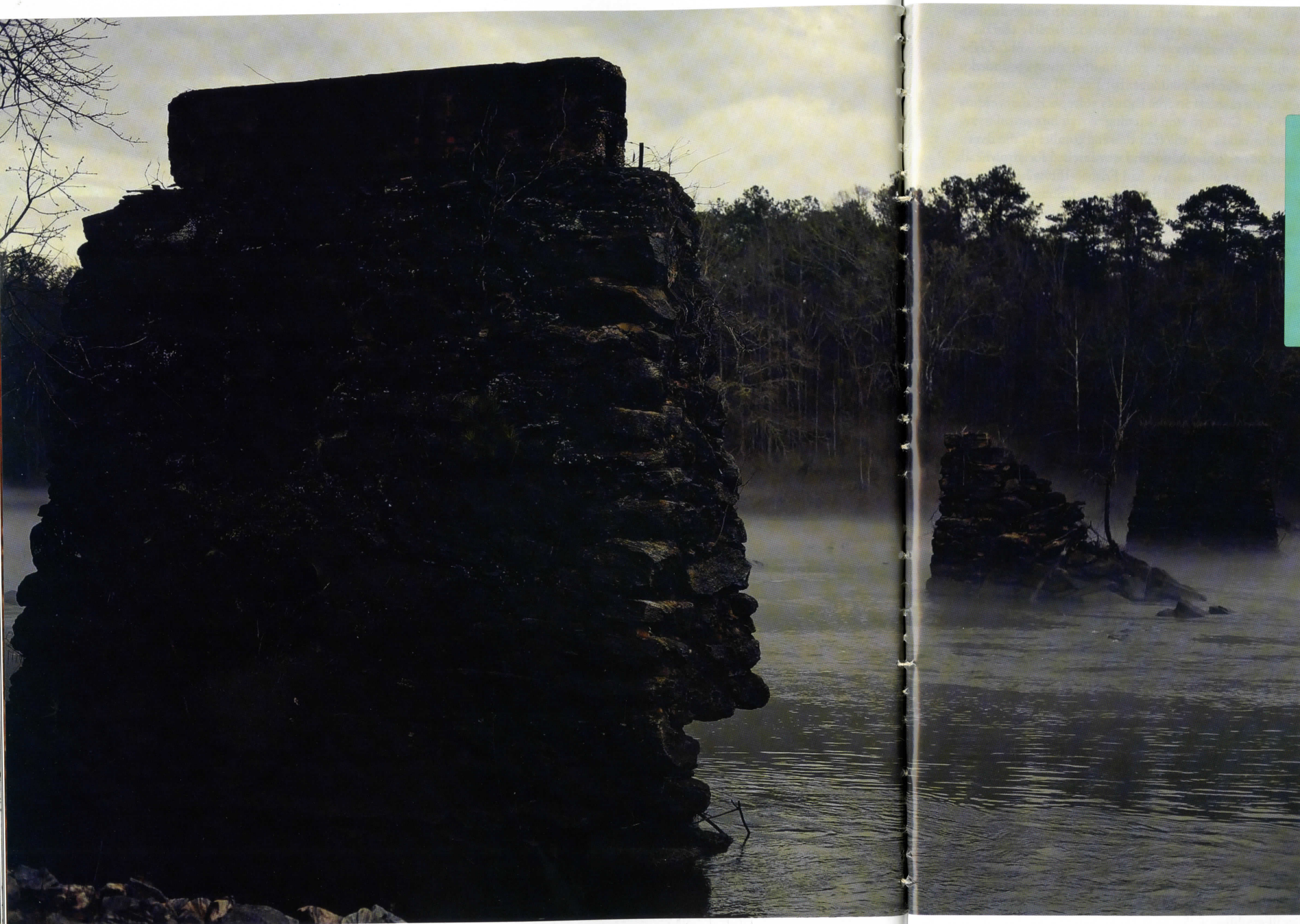
Don't hit it in the stomach; you'll spoil the meat,
my father says as he aims the gun I'm holding.
Do I have the power to spoil something so lovely?
The gun bumps the window of the shooting house.
The deer's head jerks upward, ears searching.
Alert.

One beat, two. And back to the grass.
Stupid creature,
so trusting.
My finger curls around the trigger
as I lower my eye to find him in the scope.
My mother used to forget as easily.

She would lift her head up and spew curses
—a small act of defiance—while he aimed his fist.
And then his apology. *I'm sorry I hit you, dear.*
Girls, come out of your room. Everything is fine now.
Head back down. He meant it. She was safe.
Stupid creature,
so trusting.

A dry twig crunches beneath a black hoof.
My eyes focus again on the faded white spots:
delicate and beautiful,
young but not necessarily ignorant.
I thrust the gun back into my father's arms.
I need both of my hands to hold onto my innocence.





Tallapoosa, Summer McKelvey, Canon 6D



Love Your Neighbor

Fiction by MeMe Collier

“Like a thief in the night”—that’s how I’d describe the Evanses’ arrival. They unloaded their car at the house across from ours at 12:00 a.m. on a Sunday. I remember pressing up against the window in our living room, watching their shadows shift in the porch light.

As soon as my grandmother found out that we had new neighbors, she baked a chicken and rice casserole to take to them. “What a strange time to move in,” Nanna said. “Probably woke up half the neighborhood, but what can you do?”

I didn’t care. I was just happy to find out that Colin Evans was my age. No one else on the block came close except for a bunch of younger kids who terrorized the neighborhood, leaving bicycles in the street and chasing after people’s pets. One other girl was snippy and shallow, which I might have been able to forgive, but then she persuaded me to take a ride in her bubblegum pink Barbie car, and we nearly went flying into a telephone pole. I had had enough.

Ms. Evans reminded me of my math teacher who started her mornings with four cups of coffee so strong that I could smell it from the front row. Nanna took one look at her before saying, “Please, let me help you unpack. Bea, why don’t you go help Colin?”

I followed Colin to his room, which was empty except for a few pieces of furniture and stacks of cardboard boxes. He handed me a Swiss Army knife, and I started cutting through packaging tape, trying to come up with something to say.

"What's New Jersey like?" I asked.

"Colder." Colin set a PlayStation console on his dresser. "What about here? Is there stuff to do?"

"Um . . . we've got a few malls." I tried to think what might interest a boy. "And movies and bowling and baseball."

"Cool."

"There's way more downtown, like the concert arena, and the science museum, and an old peanut roasting factory, but I don't get to go there much. It's dangerous."

"Not compared to Camden."

"I've never been there."

He gripped a baseball cap, dark blue with a red *P* emblazoned on the front, in both hands. "I've never lived anywhere else."

The sight of him looking down at that ratty cap made my stomach twist, so I went back to unpacking boxes. "Who's that?" I asked, pointing to a framed photo of Colin, his mom, and a guy I didn't recognize standing in front of a Ferris wheel.

"My brother." I gave Colin the photograph, and he placed it facedown on the bed. "You got any brothers or sisters?"

"A brother. He's a lot older than me."

"And that's not your mom downstairs?"

"No, she's my grandma."

"You're lucky. I wish I lived with my grandma. She never makes me do anything, just gives me Lifesavers all the time."

"Nanna's not that kind of grandma. She gives me chores."

"That's stupid." Colin fell back on his bed, arms pillowing his head. "Only good thing about moving is my mom's not bugging me to clean my room. But moms do that."

I wouldn't know, so I was quiet. We didn't talk again until I came across a dog-eared book series. Then, Colin came to life, telling me that it was about a kid who has the power to heal cuts and broken bones with a single touch.



When I was a baby, my mother handed me off to Nanna and then disappeared, most likely to sell drugs in a back alleyway. She died when I was six, and the only reason we even knew it was because the police found her driver's license, five months expired, in her pocket.

Nanna didn't talk about my mother much, and we didn't even know my father's name. Only later did I realize how strange that was, that he might have no idea that I existed. When I was growing up, my parents were part fairytale and part cautionary story. They were ghosts, except that they weren't because I wasn't sure whether they were dead or alive.

I knew that my family was unusual. No one ever said it, but I knew it like I knew that water was wet and bread should be white and Auburn would beat Alabama in next

year's Iron Bowl. So was Colin's family. He never mentioned his father, but he bemoaned his mother, who was constantly telling him to be careful.

"I'm sick of it," he said. Maybe that's why he didn't like to go home much, though my grandmother made similar statements whenever I got too close to a sizzling pan on the stove or stood on a stool to reach a cabinet. But maybe the difference was that my grandmother always sounded so sure, like she had no doubt that I would obey; whereas, there was a raw fear in Ms. Evans's voice, as if she were waiting for Colin to stop listening.

I showed Colin the trail running parallel to the river behind our neighborhood, and we searched for arrowheads buried in the sandbars. We had Frisbee-throwing competitions at the soccer field down the road. Sometimes we toured the block, and I told Colin all the stories I knew about our neighbors. If I didn't know a story for one of them, we'd make something up.

"What about that lady?" Colin asked one day, nodding towards the house at the end of the street. A woman was kneeling at the base of a tree in its front yard with a sunhat and a spade in hand.

"She's weird."

"Weird how?"

"I never see her unless she's working in her garden, and she doesn't say hi. Sometimes she stares as I go by."

"That garden's ugly."

It was definitely unusual. Though neatly kept, it was home to wild, exotic-looking plants—flowering cacti, leaves shaped like elephant ears, palm trees that grew fur.

**I stared, mesmerized,
at the jet of golden
sparks shooting up from
the end of the candle.**

"It won't win any beauty contests, that's for sure." I sounded like Nanna talking about the hairstyles of the women at church.

Colin laughed and stood up on his bike. The front wheel wobbled; he grabbed for the handlebars but missed, and then he and bike tumbled sideways into the flowerbeds.

The lady threw down her spade and came running over to us.

"Look what you did!" she said. The flowers, if you could call them that—they were hot pink and looked like tiny fir trees with thin trunks—were lying prone in the dirt like soldiers fallen in the trenches. "That's days of hard work destroyed."

"Sorry. It was an accident."

"You should learn to look where you're going, young man."

"I said I was sorry." Colin got to his feet and dusted off his hands, hitting his palms against each other. "Probably did you a favor, though."

"Colin. Let's just go." As he picked up his bike, I said, "We're really sorry," before hurrying with Colin back towards my house.

Three days later, the strange pink flowers were gone, and in their place were clumps of long stems with small green leaves and purple buds.

Colin spat into the bushes. "What a witch."

"Maybe she's a real witch. Uses her crazy plants for potions and stuff."

He laughed. "Yeah, sure."

"Two people have died here in the past few years. Maybe she's cursed everyone on the block, and now it'll get worse." Technically, one woman had committed suicide last Christmas Eve by setting her sedan ablaze, but the other was a boy who disappeared while hiking the river trail with his family. For my purposes, though, that didn't matter.

"Fine." The muscles in my shoulders relaxed as Colin started playing along. "Let's stop her, then."

I tensed again. "How?"

"Mess with the plants."

"We can't."

"What, are you scared? Don't you think she deserves it?"

"I'm not scared."

"Then what's the big deal?" Colin grabbed a handful of the bushes and yanked hard, pulling the plants out by the roots. "Look, it's easy."

I didn't really want to hurt the garden, even if its owner was a little mean and a lot strange. Besides, if Nanna found out, she'd ground me for weeks. But Colin didn't relent, so I glanced at the woman's house before joining him, my fingers crushing the leaves and releasing their fresh, heady scent as I tugged.



Nana said that all babies are beautiful, but I thought that Hope Evans was especially so with her soft, pink-white skin, downy hair, and wide blue eyes.

"Your little sister's cute," I said.

Hope grabbed at the air with one small hand. Colin turned his head away. "She is *not* my sister."

Hope was his brother's daughter, which was strange. Calum, her father, was never around. Ms. Evans held Hope all the time, and there was the strangest look in her eyes, as if she were seeing something more than the child in her arms. Hope smiled whenever Colin was in the room, but he treated her as if she were the chicken pox.

"Do you see your brother a lot?" I asked Colin one day.

"Sometimes. What about you?"

"Not much." I barely knew Will. He was twenty-four, recently engaged, and living three hours away. The last time I saw him was at his college graduation.

Sometimes I thought about what kind of brother Will would have been, if he were in my life beyond presents mailed for birthdays and Christmas. Usually, I thought about my mother. Nanna didn't mention her often, but when she showed me how to cook Thanksgiving dinner or sew pillows, she would say, "Your mother and I used to do this." Then I brought home my school portrait, and Nanna told me, "You look like your mother did at your age." I wondered whether I was like her in other ways. I didn't know. I didn't know if I wanted to be.



"There they go again," an elderly woman said, nodding towards the kids chasing each other around the sanctuary.

"I wish Adam and Elizabeth would tell them to settle down," Nanna said. "If you don't teach them early, they'll never learn." Maybe I was imagining it, but I could have sworn that she glanced at Colin and me as she spoke.

The congregation finally hushed when the preacher took the pulpit. "There are several people I'd like to add to our prayer list," she said. "Martha Underwood broke her hip and may be facing a move to a retirement community. I'd also like to remember Calum Evans, who's been comatose since June."

I heard Nanna let out a sigh. On my other side, Colin stared at his hands clasped in his lap so tightly that the knuckles were as pale as bone.

After the service ended, Nanna placed her hand on Ms. Evans's arm, speaking quiet words of comfort. Ms. Evans nodded before rising from the pew and leaving the sanctuary.

"I'm sorry about your brother," I told Colin.

He crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Do you know what'll happen to him?"

"I *said* I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay. Sorry." I escaped to the bathroom, heading towards the quieter one near the back of the church.

As I opened the door, I thought, at first, that a woman was laughing. But it sounded off, and then I realized that it wasn't laughter. It was sobbing.

I froze in the entrance. Witnessing a grown-up cry was like the time a ten-foot-long bull shark swam past me in the ocean—a freak encounter, frightening and strange.

The woman had probably chosen this bathroom to get away from other people, but I wondered if I should speak to her. Despite my panic, her sobs clutched at my chest. It seemed rude to just do my business in the stall next to her without saying a word, as if I didn't care that she was upset.

I forced myself to speak, my voice sounding thin as it reverberated off the tile floor. "Are you . . . Are you okay?" She sniffled, paused. "I will be, thank you."

The familiarity of that voice tickled the insides of my brain. I crouched down to see high-heel shoes, ivory with tiny flowers covering the cloth, peeking out from beneath the door.

They belonged to Ms. Evans.

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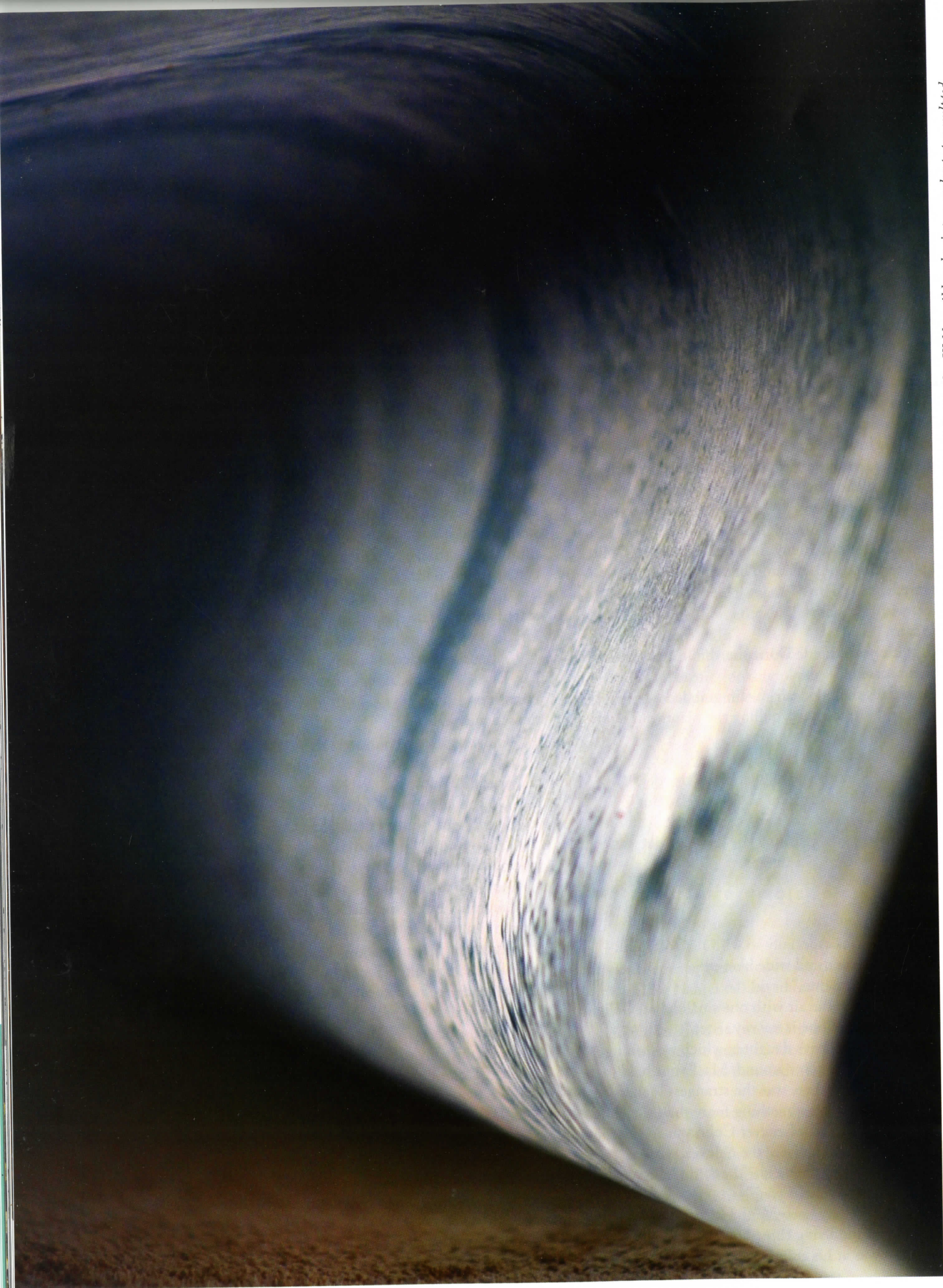
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Chasing Mavericks, Katelyn Walden, oil based paint on mylar paper sculpted

I darted out of the bathroom and back towards the safety of the sanctuary. Half the congregation stood chatting in the hallway outside, completely unaware of their visitor crying in the bathroom. Fleeting, I wondered if Ms. Evans's tears were just because Calum was in a coma, or if she'd been expecting God to heal him and had so far been disappointed.



"Where's Colin today?"

Nanna was fixing dinner, lasagna and green bean casserole, and I was setting the table. "He's visiting Calum with his mom."

"I can't imagine how hard that must be for them."

"Yeah."

Nanna opened the oven door, checked the lasagna, and closed it. "You've been spending an awful lot of time with Colin lately."

"So?" I knew that Nanna didn't really like him. That's why her offer earlier this week to babysit Hope and let Colin spend the whole day at our house surprised me, but I guess that was to give Ms. Evans a break.

"He just seems a little rough. I've heard some things from the neighbors."

My heart beat hard and fast in my chest, and I could feel heat creeping up my neck and into my cheeks. "Like what?"

"Patsy—you know, the lady with the big garden—said Colin tore up her flowerbeds."

My tongue felt thick in my mouth, more like a dormant snake than an organ. "He didn't mean to."

"Both times? I doubt it."

"I mean, yeah, that's bad, but I guess it's his way of getting his frustrations out. From everything going on."

"I do feel sorry for him, but that doesn't excuse his behavior." Nanna walked over to me and ran a hand through my hair. I leaned back into her touch. "You don't act like that, and you've certainly had your share of hardship."

I wasn't entirely sure what she meant by "hardship," but I also wasn't sure that I wanted to know. Hearing it aloud made it real.

"I just don't want him to rope you into trouble, that's all."

"Messing with flowers isn't a crime."

"It's destruction of property, and that can escalate quicker than you think."

I moved out from under her hand. To someone else, Nanna would just sound strict, but I knew who else had made a series of bad choices that led to worse ones. "Nanna . . . Is this . . . Is this about Mom?"

Nanna's arm dropped to rest by her side. "Why would you think that?"

"I feel like you think I'm turning into her or something."

"Of course not," she said, but her voice sounded funny. "You know I love you, and I'm only trying to protect you."

"Yeah, I know, but Colin's my friend." An image of Colin in the woman's garden, his hands stained with purple, flashed across my thoughts. I shoved it away. "I'm fine."



The night of the Fourth of July, Colin woke me by nearly breaking my bedroom window with a rock. When he said he had something to show me, I knew that Nanna and his mom probably wouldn't approve since he'd waited until they were asleep. But my curiosity won out, so there we were, sitting on his rooftop with skyrockets, bottle rockets, and Roman candles in brightly colored packaging spilling across the shingles like candy.

"Where'd you get these?"

"My dad."

"I didn't know your dad was even around."

"He's usually not. He came the other day when we went to see Calum."

And then there was Calum. I never would have found out that his brother was in the hospital if it hadn't been for the announcement in church. "Colin . . . What happened to him?"

Colin stared up at the moon, which had to hurt, it was so bright. "Car accident. Hope was in the backseat."

"I'm sorry." I was sorry for Hope, too. I didn't know which was worse, to lose someone you'd loved your whole life or to never know them at all.

"Yeah, well. Crap happens." I wanted to say that it was okay to be mad or sad, that he could talk to me, that I wanted him to, but then Colin picked up a match and said, his tone a little too light, "Let's get this party started."

I hesitated for only a moment. I'd begged Nanna to buy me fireworks for years, but she insisted that they were dangerous. But surely they couldn't be *that* bad. I knew that several families living in the neighborhood behind ours set them off every Fourth of July and New Year's Eve.

The popping broke the quiet as loudly as a train barreling through a station, but the fear of getting caught and the shock of the firework going off in my hand soon dissipated. I stared, mesmerized, at the jet of golden sparks shooting up from the end of the candle. Then I moved onto a bottle rocket, which spiraled as it arced through the air. It looked like a mix of lightning and magic.

"Beatrice! What in the world are you doing?"

Nanna was standing outside the Evanses' front door in her nightgown. Even from the rooftop, I could see that she was nearly shaking with anger.

"We're celebrating Fourth of July. For real," Colin said.

"That's a good way to burn down the neighborhood." Nanna fixed her gaze on me. "Bea, I expected better of you. Did you ever stop to think that you could have set our house on fire? No, you did not."

"Wait, what?" I asked.

"Look where you're pointing those things. Your fireworks have been landing on our roof," Nanna said, stabbing a finger towards our house. "That's what woke me up."

My blood felt like molten metal rushing through my veins. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"You never do." Nanna sighed. "All right, you've had your fun. It's time to go to bed." As I got to my feet, she said, "Colin, you, too. I'm not going to wake up your mother, but I'll have to tell her in the morning what you both have been up to."

"How come we didn't wake *her* up?" I asked as I started climbing down.

"Sleeping pills," Colin said. "I swear, she naps more than Hope."

Together, we got off the roof and crawled back through Colin's window. Once we were inside, he said, "I'll see you later."

"Maybe not. I don't know how long I'll get grounded."

"You can always sneak out again."

His response shouldn't have surprised me. I felt obligated to say, "That'll only make it worse," though I doubted that mattered to him.

As soon as I reached Nanna, she took me by the shoulder and marched me across the street. "Do you see now? What did I tell you about that boy?"

I didn't speak. I knew what admitting defeat would mean. Nanna made sure that I went to my room before going to hers, but I didn't go to sleep for a long time. I sat awake in my bed, staring across the street through my window until I saw the light in Colin's room finally go out.



My punishment ended eight days later when Calum Evans passed away.

I found Colin sitting in the middle of the river that afternoon. The water was low this time of year, so the log was submerged only a few inches deep. We'd found this spot a few weeks ago, and I liked it because you could see the river in both directions until it curved around the bend.

I could have said that I was sorry, but I'd already said that, and it hadn't done any good. Instead, I asked, "Why didn't you tell me?"

Colin didn't look at me. "It only happened last night."

"That's not what I mean, and you know it."

He slung a rock he'd been holding across the water. It skipped once before plunking into a deeper part of the river. "My brother was going to die. Who wants to tell somebody that?"

I remained silent, trying to decide whether I should ask him why he never told me anything—not about his brother, or his dad, or his time in New Jersey. Or maybe I should let it go. It stung, that there was so much about Colin that he didn't want me to know, but it was his life. I didn't want to make that about me.

There was the gurgling of water rushing over rocks, the chirping of birds, the rustling of aspen trees overhead. After a while, Colin spoke. "Calum used to take me hiking sometimes. He would've liked this place."

I picked up a flattened rock. I tried skipping it, and it jumped three times before sinking. "My mom's dead. I know it's not the same, but . . . just so you know."

Colin squeezed the rock in his own hand and threw it as far as he could. "That sucks. It's not fair."

"No. It's really not."

"Sometimes I wish Calum was okay instead."

It took me a second to understand, and then I understood all too well. I didn't know whether I should be pleased with his honesty or horrified at the admission.

"You know, maybe that guy who went missing wasn't kidnapped or murdered after all. Maybe he got fed up with everything and just left. I wouldn't blame him."

"You're saying you want to run away?" I asked.

"Yeah," Colin said, sounding as if he had just realized that himself. "I am."

"Colin . . ." I thought of his mother's trembling hands, her hunched shoulders, her permanently furrowed brows. ". . . that would kill your mom."

"I just . . . I can't stand her sometimes."

"She cares about you."

"She drives me crazy."

I opened my fist, letting the remaining rocks in my hand fall into the water with a splash.

"At least you have a mom."

Colin didn't speak, but he lowered his head to gaze at the river running across his shoes. I stared at him sitting on that log before heading towards the riverbank.



I saw Colin's father and Hope's mother for the first time at the funeral. Ms. Evans looked like she was in shock, and though Colin's eyes were red, he didn't cry. Neither did Hope. She remained quietly watchful throughout the service, as if she were drinking it all in so that she might remember this day even if she would not remember her father.

As I watched them lower Calum's casket into his grave, I thought of the mother I never knew, the father I'd never know, the brother I still didn't know, and I was angry. I was angry at Colin, at Nanna, at my mother, at the world for taking away what people cared about most, and that scared me. I wasn't mad before I met the Evanses because I didn't know to be, or I didn't want to know; but now I did, and that had changed me. I couldn't fully say how, but it had.

A week later, the Evanses' house was dark, the rooms stripped bare of furniture. They left as they came, secretly in the dead of night, and just like that, I was the only twelve-year-old on the block again. Later, I realized that the Evanses had moved here for the sole purpose of waiting for Calum to die, that Colin had known all along that they weren't going to stay. Maybe that was why neither Colin nor his mother told Nanna or me goodbye. ○



Teacup, Kate McCollum, Canon EOS Rebel T2



His Response to Norman Rockwell's *Sunday Morning*

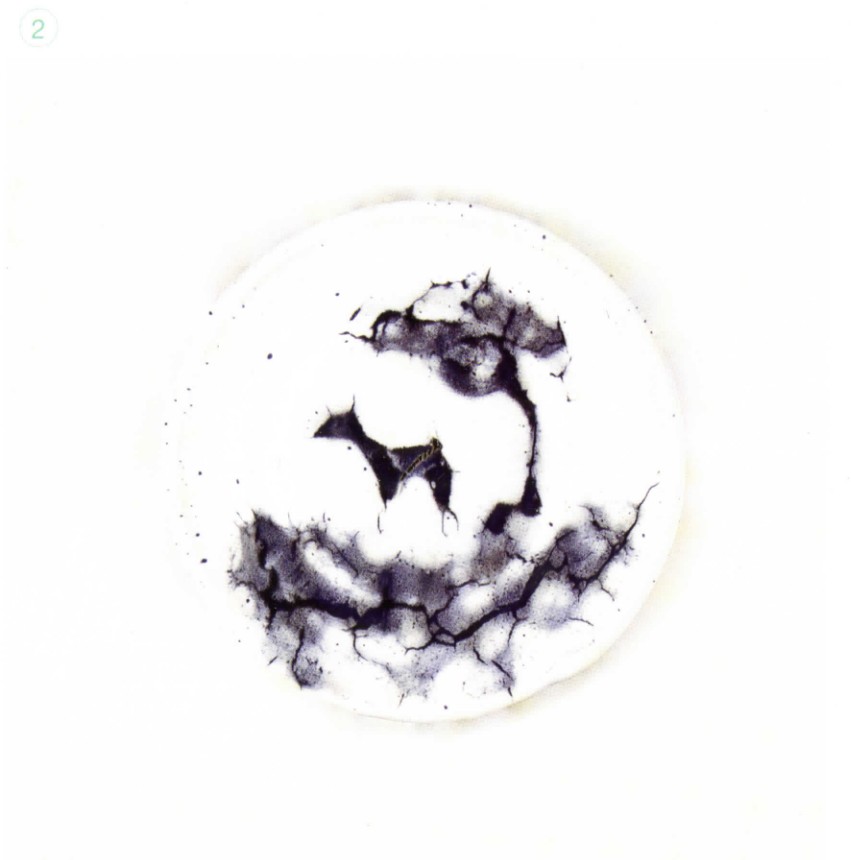
Poetry by MeMe Collier

Eight o'clock sharp the alarm goes off
to make it to the first church service.
She's been awake for half an hour
placing rollers in hair, donning a hat,
slipping on white silk gloves—
all parts of a well-oiled machine (the lady)
that moves in only one direction (onwards).
By nine, the children are dressed and ready to go,
lined up like soldiers in battle fatigues,
armed for the war of the soul.
He sinks low in his seat
as he reads the news,
gripping the paper like a lifeline,
hoping that the soldiers and the machine
march past him on their merry way.

And it isn't that he wants to skip out on church
—he likes the songs and scriptures just fine—
so much as that he hates that awful
yellow tie, a gift from Helen's mother,
and finding an empty pew like a game of musical chairs.
And the pastor bears news of sulfurous flames
while Mrs. Potts and Miss Robinson swap notes
from Wednesday's bridge club chatter
("Can you believe that Mary Jane
ran off with a fellow from Richmond?")
And there's the same Sunday brunch
(Belgian waffles and over-salted eggs)
at the crowded country club
(it always rained when he was on the golf course).

He knows by heart the weekly rundown,
as regular as the time of a hand-wound watch
or a serial's showing on the radio.
So he keeps on sinking in his seat
as the train of his family trundles by.
He still reads his paper, business section first,
but he'll pass over the comics as penance.

1. Raku, Mallory Vieira, clay
2. Deer Plate, Joseph Wheeler, ceramics
3. Cream and Sugar, Lydia Sweeney, ceramics



Soak

Poetry by Nathaniel Vincent

My father tells me it is very important
that I soak the bristles of my toothbrush
in hot water,
so it won't hurt my gums.
He tells me they won't grow back.

I am watching him rip our porch apart.
I hear my mother crying.

Everyone else just stares,
observes his strength and counts
the cuts and splinters.

I am thinking
this is not how she wanted it to end,
our dog.

She had dug her way under the porch
to die quietly.
A steady and slow breathing
that reached my ears through everything.

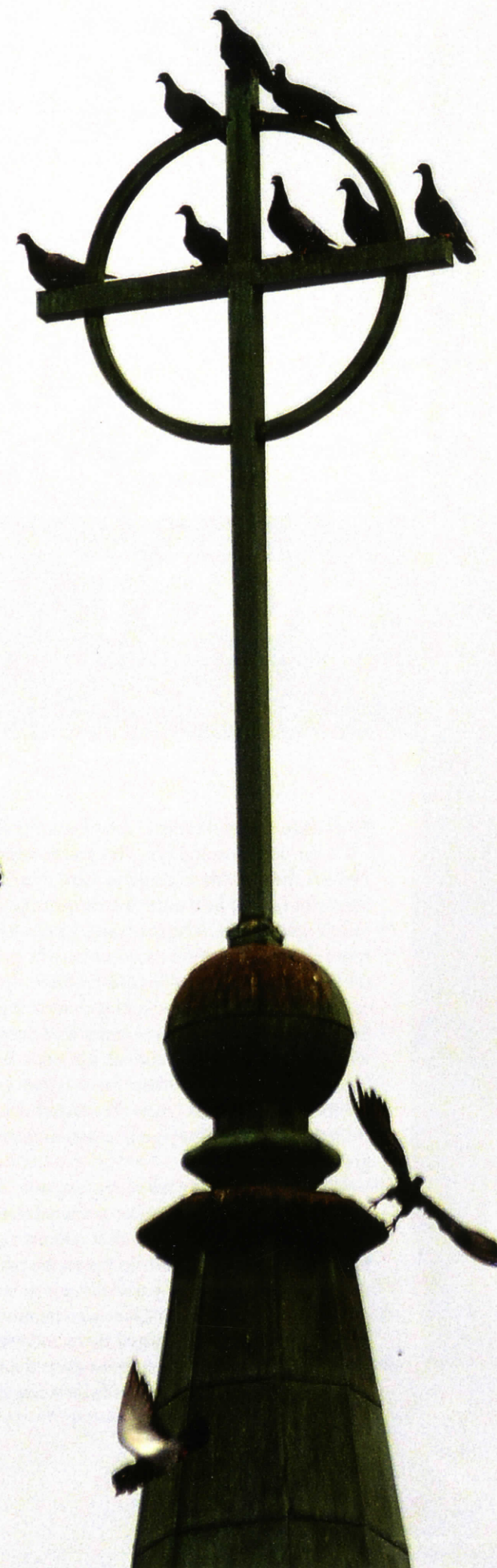
*

I tried soaking everything
he had left me.
I used every sink, tub, bowl, and bucket,
the water boiling,
everything stagnant for days.

The books bloomed and bled.
The clothes became dim masses of steam.
His watch still ticked off time, like sonar.

I was looking from something to rise
from the water,
up from the steam.

I was searching for
enough strength to reach him,
to pass through wood and dirt
to see if he is still breathing
somehow, slowly.



HOST

Fiction by Jelani J. Moore

Maggots. Good remedy for an open wound, that is, for the anti-hospital type. They start from the inside. Devour the dead flesh. Make it clean. Danny was a resourceful fellow; he denied the institution, and so the institution denied him. Maggots come cheap for a butcher. He started with a handful, a small colony. It tickled. It worked for a while, but the smell was a problem. The stench of an open, maggot-infested wound isn't something that would go unnoticed at work. But Danny was clever; he closed it with stitching, maggots and all. He left a few holes for air. He was thoughtful like that; the maggots were not. They ate their way out, and when they tasted the fresh air, they turned into flies. Danny grew emotional, prided himself in giving life.

Work eventually fell to the wayside. The maggots were his purpose. His absence attracted the attention of the neighbor. She came at sunset. Danny refused to answer the door. The wound grew deeper as the maggots grew unusually larger. One in particular got to be the size of a peanut. It was too big for Danny, so he moved it to its own habitat: road kill. It prospered there and eventually earned the name Solo. But Solo outgrew even the road kill, so Danny smuggled a pig carcass from work. Solo adapted.

It grew to the size of a Chi Tzu in under a month. After three months, a Great Dane.

Danny resorted to keeping it submerged in a tub of pig's blood. It stopped growing and lied dormant for some time. Danny feared the worst. After a few days, Solo began to swell and turn purple. It secreted a foul discharge from its pores, and its insides pulsed at irregular times in various places.

One evening, Danny went to remove Solo so that he could refill the tub. When he embraced his friend, it released the contents of its insides into the tub. The maggot's body deflated and from it came a figure. It was human in likeness—identical, almost, to Danny, with the exception of the wound. It could speak but not independently. It only repeated Danny, much like a parrot. Danny disposed of the maggot's remains and cleaned off his clone.

Danny was very fond of his new friend, but it was too perfect. It had smooth, soft features as if ageless. Danny was scruffy and worn. He grew envious of Solo. He slept close to it at night and stroked its hair as it slept. He taught it how to read and write. Soon they were equal—except for the fact that *it* was healthy, and Danny was not.

Solo began to think and act for and by itself. And though Danny was proud of this, his envy increased. The

remaining maggots had by now all turned into flies and left him. The wound did not heal. Danny grew gravely ill and would not leave the bed for days. Solo helped as much as it could, but Danny rejected. His condition worsened until he could hardly move or respond to anything. After four months, he died. Solo, being unfamiliar with death, did only what it knew to do.

After cleaning the body, Solo removed the head and drained the blood into the bathtub. Once empty, it inserted a blade at the base of the neck, cutting across just beneath the skin—then downwards, vertically along the crease of the chest. It pulled back the thick layers of skin and removed the internal organs. Solo wrapped the contents within the stomach and placed it in a large pot of boiling water. It then proceeded to cut the flesh from the bone until the body had been picked clean, as if by a gang of buzzards. Solo boiled the flesh, as well. Last came the brain. Solo took to the head with a cleaver and chopped clean through the top of the skull. It removed both halves of the brain and added them to the pot. The stew cooked for three hours. The delicious aroma attracted the attention of the neighbor. She arrived shortly after sunset. Solo answered the door and cordially invited her to dinner. ○



Indecisive, Joseph Wheeler, acrylic on canvas

Modes of Transfusion

Poetry by Nathaniel Vincent

All that comes from me
is rain.

I have found the blood
you lost.

I untwist warm nerves.
My will
strains and wavers
as I search.
The bright knife
remains cold.

Tires
across the wet
ground, sounding off,
like the slow tearing
of paper.

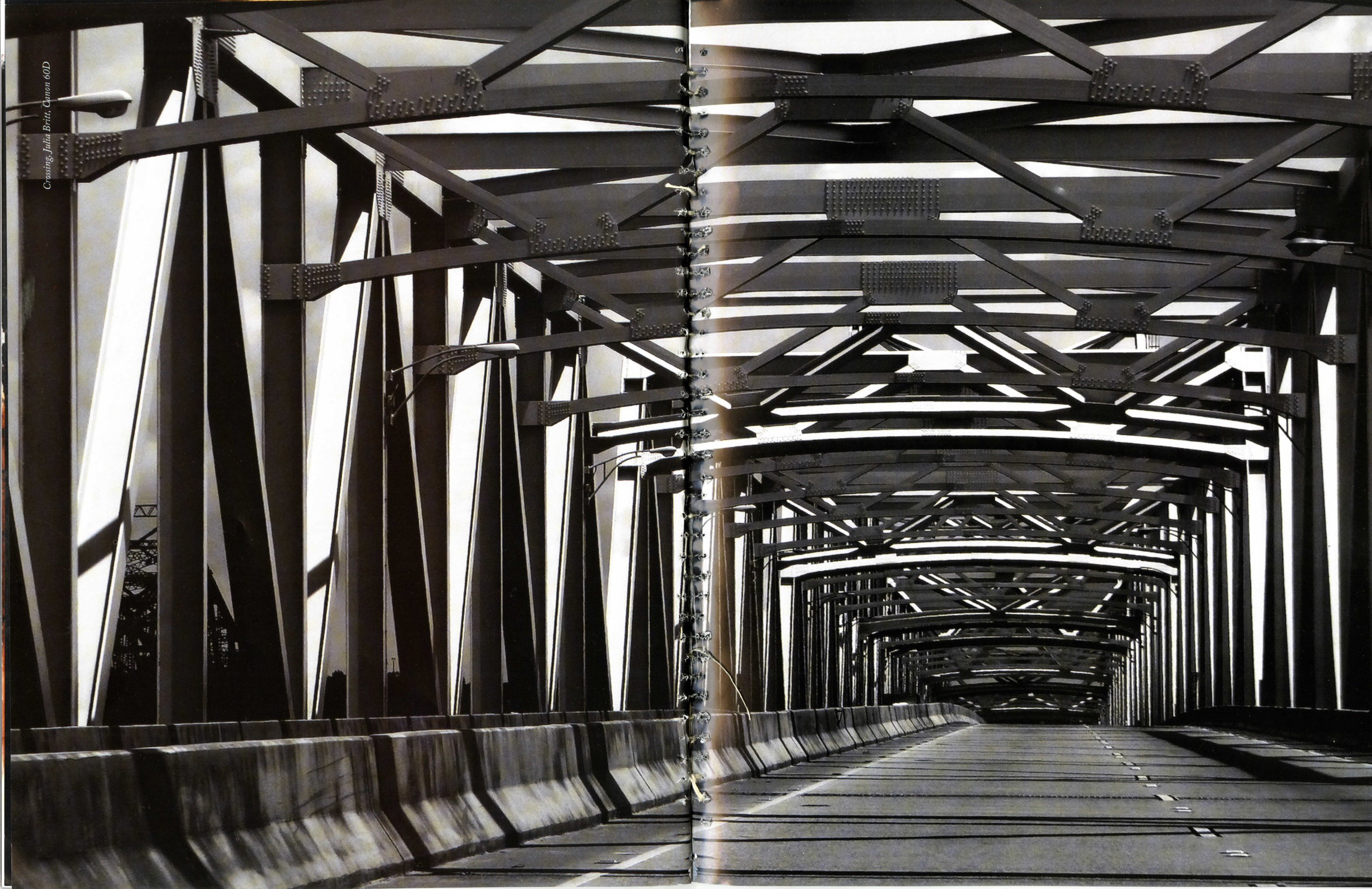
Everything is
bleeding without bleeding.

Night after night
giving you
all I can spare
but your blood
remains.

All that comes from me
is rain.

I rest my hand
on yours until
it is no longer
mine.

I wake,
alone
in your love.



Pull Out

Poetry by Jelani J. Moore

I am the boy in the
hand-me-down
sedan.

The passenger's
seat reserved for
a stranger.

I rev the engine.

She turns to me:

Fuck off.

I smile.

It's all in the actions.
Eye contact.
Translation:

Marriage.

Green light,
time to go.
It's not her fault;
It's her mileage.

Tech Calls, Summer McKevey, Canon 6D





Enclosed, Kathryn Winkle, relief print

House

Poetry by Emma Hyché

I'm thinking of houses not as houses
but as people. The way your side
is a radiator, emanating heat when I curl
in like a comma before you turn away.
The way your collarbones could hold
rainwater like gutters growing thinner.
I'm going to move into you.
I'm going to throw my things
all over the floor and tack posters
on all the walls. I'm going to lose
your security deposit. I'm going to leave
floss curling like a question mark
on the mint green of your bathroom tile.
When I sweep glass from the floor,
I comb lines into your wet hair.
When I scrub the grout with a toothbrush,
I wipe the blood snaking between your teeth.



Elevations, Andrew Swindle, Nikon D810

For Sale

Poetry by Jelani J. Moore

Mother's golden tooth.
A few nicks and some fading.
Forty-five dollars.

Resurface

Poetry by Ariel Cartwright

I have nothing
left in my head left
staring straight a
head left at the light.
Here are the stars
caught bright handing
me a lighter to set fires
to bridges already burnt.
White cinders scrub
frightened air clean
sneezing sheer static
rain against broken wire bones.
Here are the sound
waves off a distant shore
leaves tripping over wind
storms across midwestern plains.
I have nothing
left to bear
fruit left to rot
on white porches left
by American Dreamers
left quiet.

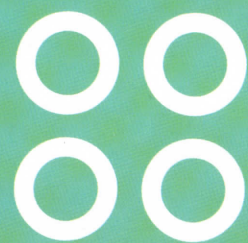


Pompeii Stonework, Mallory Vieira, Nikon D3100





Twinkle, Michelle Park, Nikon D5100



Kapatid

Fiction by Paula Judit

It was a Thursday evening, but I wasn't in my usual nest with a glass of cheap wine in one hand and thirty pages of notes for a clinical study of a hypothetical patient with anemia in the other. Instead, I had one leg up towards my chest as I adjusted myself in the stiff, barely cushioned metallic chair in SFO's terminal, trying to search my Facebook newsfeed on my phone for any news that I missed. My sister, Christina, was picking me up from our hometown, Daly City. It was uncharacteristic for her to be late, and there was a brief moment that I wondered if I should call her.

Christina was a second year business major at Berkley. She always held herself up like a proud lion overlooking the horizon. It was always important to uphold heritage and tradition, as she liked to put it. She always went to church with Mom on Sundays, took up piano practices after school, and did her best to learn Tagalog. I always thought she just tried too hard to act a part she wasn't meant to play, like the awkward side character that tried too hard to get screen time on TV.

When my sister did arrive, I immediately noticed her fall fashion. She wore a red turtleneck blouse with a chocolate brown skirt. Her black leggings wrapped around her thin legs like shadows. Her jet-black riding boots clicked against the airport's tiled floor.

"Ate Vivian!" Her arms wrapped around my waist as I returned the embrace.

"Good to see you, too. What took you so long?"

"Something came up on campus, and I lost track of time. I'm really sorry!"

"Nothing to apologize for. I was just getting comfortable."

The ride home involved a lot of shallow catching up: the plane trip, classes, and mild compliments on clothing choices. Unsurprisingly, Christina was playing some song covered by a Filipino. I rolled my eyes.

"You dyed your hair again," Christina kept her eyes on the road, but made a vague hand motion towards me. "It looks better in person than in the pictures."

"Thanks."

A pause as the singer on the radio took a breath.

"*Nanay's* going to love it."

"Wow, you haven't shown her my profile picture already? That's new..."

A blanket of silence dropped as the song ended, and neither of us chose to sing the next tune. We had gotten into a fight about Dad before I moved to Texas to start medical school, and we never chose to properly resolve

it. She had talked about how great our family was doing without Dad. There was no way I was going to let her keep saying that without a word or two from my mouth. It was a heated fight, and we had stopped as soon as we heard Mom's car come into the driveway.

So it was a bit of a surprise when I saw her text saying to come back to California for Christmas. We hadn't talked in a couple of months before then, and I had already gotten knee deep in my ocean of assignments and cadavers. She wanted to surprise Mom under the guise that it was our turn to honor her for rearing us. I wasn't sure if she was trying to make another jab at me because of Dad, but I had decided to go along with it. A week back in Daly City wasn't going to kill me, and I had wanted to meet up with a few of my friends.

My first night home wasn't out of the ordinary from the likely scenarios I had pictured in my mind. Mom was elated to see me, embraced me, and was glad to see us together. I had a feeling she was going through empty nest syndrome. Her time of holding two jobs to give us a suitable life, the all-American life, had finally ended. It was hard not to notice her years of hard labor; the wrinkles that plagued her face, the coarse landscape along her palms, and the grey lines that trickled along the black ocean gave away her aging physicality. Still, like all Filipino mothers, she still held a burning fire inside her soul that was meant to inspire her family. It was, as many would preach, the mother's role to nurture and bring out the best in her child. Maybe that was why we got a lot of pity when Dad left.

On the second day, I had a meeting to attend. Mom had already left for work, so Christina was the one who ended up confronting me in the kitchen.

"You're leaving already? You couldn't wait another day before at least—"

"Going out for some sister bonding day? That's pretty much what Christmas is for." I snatched my sister's car keys from the kitchen countertop. "See you later."

The drive into San Francisco was about forty minutes long, thanks to traffic, but once I arrived in Japan Town, it seemed like everything was worth it. I walked through Peace Plaza; the trees that surrounded the plaza were bare, with the exception of a few leaves that still hung onto the branches. I used to enjoy coming to this area for the Cherry Blossom Festival. My ex, Joshua, had once compared me to a cherry blossom and made a poem about my beauty being like the vibrant pink flower. I remembered how he rubbed his thumb over my jaw and how his thin lips slid perfectly against mine off stage. I had thoroughly

believed we were the ones for each other, and we had dated for almost two years. But he was my downfall when I found him having an intimate exchange with a sorority girl. The rest was history, and I tucked it away in my past regrets. Maybe I became different, but I believed I came out a stronger woman.

I returned home the next morning, feeling like a troll was pounding against the side of my head with a hammer. I stumbled out of Christina's car then jammed the house key into the lock. It took some fiddling, but I managed to push the door open.

"Ate?" Christina stood up from the dining room table and approached me. She must've thought I looked terrible, considering her disgusted expression. "Ate, are you okay?"

"Does it look like I'm okay?" I scoffed and dropped my purse on the cheap granite countertop. "Nanay left?"

"Yeah"

"Great."

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"To bed."

"Please tell me you're just having a hangover."

Christina grabbed my wrist as I got closer to my bedroom door. "You're going to be a doctor, and this is how you treat yourself?"

"You're going to reprimand me? Seriously? You're not the big sister going to medical school around here. But, oh, thanks for letting me use your car."

"We haven't seen each other in months, and you barely text or call me now. Can't you just—"

"Talk to you?"

"Stop avoiding me?"

I wrenched my wrist out of her grip. Before she could get a word in, I slammed the door in front of her. My framed pictures beside the door shook from the impact, and a couple of them toppled off the dresser. I expected the glass to break and flinched at the imaginary sound. When I checked, however, the frame was fine. I held up the picture of Christina and me; we were still kids at the time, enjoying a family adventure in the city.

My sister was eight years old, and I had just turned ten, and we were sitting inside an ice cream parlor. We were sharing a banana split, and my lips and chin were coated with chocolate and melted cream. My sister had a spoon in her mouth while holding up a peace sign. It was stereotypically Asian of her, even as a kid, but we were innocent then. Hell, we were much happier then. Dad snapped the picture, and Mom pulled out a napkin to wipe away the cold dessert off our chins. Dad was still part of our family; Mom had time to give us goodnight kisses, and Christina still believed I was a good role model. I was flying through my childhood, too, and believed I could be the best older sister and daughter a girl could be.

But we were older, and it was hard to imagine what it would be like if Dad was still in our lives. Everyone moved on differently, but Christina and I ended up swimming through rough waters. I couldn't blame her; I spiraled downward after Dad picked up his luggage and left. Local



counseling was the best thing I could afford for myself, but it wasn't enough to put an end to my list of alcohol abuse and failed boyfriends. Not many people would want to associate themselves with that kind of bad luck, including my sister. We kept our distance since.

Mom returned home a few hours later, and I took the groceries from her to help cook.

"Nanay, you can sit down while I get everything started."

"Where is your sister?"

"I don't know... I think she went out."

Mom placed her bag on the couch and took a seat with a heavy sigh. "How's your *tatay*? Have you spoken with him?"

"Dad's okay," I poured the dry rice into the rice cooker. "He's moving to a hospital in New York, though."

"Good for him."

"Nanay, you don't have to keep asking me about him if it's too uncomfortable." I sounded half-hearted, knowing full well that Mom was curious. When I started seeing Dad again a couple of years ago, it was the first time I felt like I had to get Mom's approval. She was the one who got

hurt from the separation, and I knew what it felt like to be pushed to the side because of another woman. I expected her to say I wasn't allowed to see him, but maybe it was a motherly instinct to look for the best opportunities for their child, and she ended up agreeing to the meetings.

"I'm not uncomfortable, Vivian. Why? I can't ask questions about your *tatay*?"

"No ... I was just looking out for you."

"You should be looking after your sister."

"She's a grown woman, too, and you raised her to be independent and competent. I have nothing more to offer."

"You're her *ate*, and she still looks up to you." She stood up and walked over to the kitchen. "Don't shut her out."

"Okay, okay."

I watched Mom doze off on the couch, enjoying her moment of peace. She was always like that, even before Dad left. It was routine for her to take at least two or three power naps during the day, and I actually picked up that habit, too. I used to wonder if Mom was an insomniac, but, apparently, she took the power naps because it was "scientifically proven" that naps improved a person's mood and progress through the day. Whenever something was "scientifically proven," she tended to test it out to see if it was legitimate. When I was still in college, I used to share with her all the articles about doctor's suggestions to alleviate chronic stress. There was even a time Mom convinced us to go with her to do yoga because there was research being done about how it calmed people down. Of course it became too expensive for us to continue, but she said she approved of the methods.

The smell of *kare-kare* and *mechado* filled the halls later that night, and I was able to take a break by watching my favorite *teleserye*, *My Faithful Husband*. The younger sister, who was supposed to be the voice of reason, had slapped her older sister for cheating on her husband. I knew it was dramatic, and unnecessary in all regards, but the acting was too compelling for me not to watch. As the characters' argument got heated, I heard the front door open.

"Christina?" Mom called out from the kitchen. "Oh, *kain na!*"

"I'm coming!" Christina shuffled into the living room as she placed her bag on the ground. "Oh! Did I miss anything good?"

I shot a glance over at her. "You watch this?"

"Of course. I stream it on campus all the time."

I smiled and filled her in on what was going on in the episode. It was a little odd for both of us, but I was at least trying to be a better sister.

Christmas Day came a couple days later. I normally wasn't one to make big reveals, especially since that was Christina's thing. But after Mom's advice about being a better sister, I figured I ought to do something memorable. This year, we decided not to go to any Filipino parties and stuck with ourselves at home. Mom played Christmas music from an old CD she used every year. I helped arrange the gifts under our plastic, poorly managed tree, while Christina set out the food on the table. Christina and I wore identical red blouses and black pants, but I had her wear a reindeer headband while I got the elf hat. It was the first time we genuinely laughed at each other.

We were about to eat when we heard a knock at the door. I quickly stood up and placed my hand on Mom's shoulder. "I'll get it."

I hurried to the door. Dad stood behind the door, holding three boxes in his arms. I knew it was a risk inviting Dad over for Christmas, especially when I hadn't told Mom about it. It would be good for Christina, especially

since they were close for a time. Though it was last minute, I was glad that Dad had dropped everything to see us.

"I hope I'm not late. Traffic was terrible." He tilted his head to the side to peer over one of the green boxes. "May I?"

I took one of the boxes from his arms and led him inside. Christina was already standing, but her expression was stoic. Mom was slowly rising.

"Richard?" Mom's voice cracked, and the sound she made when he lowered the boxes onto the floor made my chest tighten.

"*Nanay*, Christina, I..." I looked over at Dad. "I asked *tatay* to come over, as a surprise."

Dad couldn't get a word in; as soon as he took a breath, Christina held Mom close to her.

"He's not welcome here, *ate*."

"Give him a chance, Christina. I talked to him and—"

"We don't need him!"

"Just listen to what he has to say."

"He left us for ten years, and now he gets to just waltz in here because you said so?"

Mom tried to grab her shoulder to comfort her, but Christina rolled it off and stormed towards her room. She slammed the door, leaving a cringe-worthy silence in its wake.

"Maybe I should go," Dad looked at me with a sympathetic smile. "I don't want to ruin your Christmas."

"Stay." Mom stepped forward. "I'll talk to Christina."

It was already a wild twist of events for me, and I could only nod. If Mom said it was okay, then everything was taken care of. I had Dad take a seat at the sofa while his eyes wandered the living room walls.

"I taught you how to walk here," he said.

"You did. *Nanay* still has the pictures from way back then."

"Does she? She's always been a good collector." He inhaled deeply. "I should've expected this. Christina still doesn't want me around."

"She'll come around."

Almost an hour later, Mom and Christina came out. Dad stood up like an eager puppy waiting to be praised. But his smile withered away when he saw Christina's red eyes. I felt this crushing despair against my chest. I fucked up.

"Christina, I'm sorry, I should've called...." Dad tried to start a conversation, but Christina looked away.

"Let's just get this over with."

I remember the night before Dad left. Christina and I shared a room at the time, and we were peering outside our door to see what was going on. Mom and Dad were yelling at one another, which was a rare occurrence. Dad had a naturally loud voice, but he never raised his voice towards Mom. On the other hand, Mom was normally a soft-spoken woman until that night. She demanded to know the truth from him, like it would unravel a mystery that had been floating between them. I tried protecting Christina from it by ushering her to bed. Their anger was

seeping into our room, so I sung her a lullaby while she clung onto my pajamas. It was the best act of sisterly love I'd ever done for her.

The next day, Dad kissed us on our foreheads as he picked up his luggage. He was leaving, Mom told us, and wouldn't be coming back. This startled us, but it was Christina who wrapped her scrawny arms around Dad's waist. Her high-pitched wails could be heard throughout the entire neighborhood, and Dad couldn't calm her down. I had to step up and peel her limbs off. Ever since, she's been devastated by Dad's betrayal.

"I had hoped," I stood up and approached my sister. "that you two could talk. He's still our *tatay*, whether you like it or not."

I felt this crushing
despair against my
chest. I fucked
up.

Christina looked at me, and betrayal was written all over her expression. The sorrow and anger in her eyes made me take a step back. Christmas lunch was awkward and even more uncomfortable with Christina's brooding. Mom, at least, was more lenient. Despite her stiff back and fake smiles, she did her best to make genuine conversations. Some worked rather well, but it was hard to pull Christina into them. Eventually, she excused herself from the table to go back to her room. I knew I was responsible for this, and I had to somehow make it right.

I scarfed down my food and excused myself to talk to Christina. She was sitting on her bed, her hands hiding her face. She was blessed with the talent to cry silently, but I watched her shoulders tremble and shudder. There was one deep inhale followed by short, quick puffs of air escaping her lips. I couldn't find any tissues, so I snatched toilet paper from her bathroom. I offered it to her so she could look presentable, but she turned away.

"Come on, Christina..." I sat next to her.

"*Bakit ba...*? What did I do to deserve this, huh?"

When I had no reply, she grabbed her pillow and smacked me with it. "Why did you bring him here?"

I tried to push the pillow away, but Christina just kept hitting me with it. Her childish attitude was starting to get on my nerves.

"You think this is funny? Do you realize what you just did?" Her voice croaked.

"Uh, yeah. I brought *tatay* over so we can have a whole Christmas."

"Whole?"

"Okay, that was probably the wrong word but—"

Christina stood up and shoved the pillow in my face. "Jesus, Christina! *Walang hiya ka.*"

"You should be the one who's ashamed! You know, when I planned out surprising mom with this, I didn't expect you to pull this stunt. At least I considered Mom's feelings first."

"This is a great time for us, Christina. Remember that sister bonding you wanted? Well, we can do it and have some bonding time with *tatay*."

"He doesn't deserve to be called *tatay*, not after everything he's done. And what about *nanay*, huh? Did you consider her feelings when you invited him?"

"Yes and I had a feeling she would be okay with it."

"Maybe you don't know *nanay* at all..."

A low groan slipped out from my throat. I knew she was upset, and she had every right to be, but I had to defend myself, too. If she wanted the truth, she was going to get it.

"I've been talking to Dad for about a year now." I said. "I even went drinking with him a couple days ago. Look, he's been paying for my medical school tuition. That scholarship I had wasn't remotely close enough to get me through, but Dad was willing to help me out. *Nanay* knows about this, too, and she knows that I'm on good terms with him. So, yeah, I had high hopes that she would be accepting."

There was a blanket of silence between us as Christina tried to picture everything in her head. It was starting to get uncomfortable, but she was the one who kicked the blanket off first.

"You never tell me anything anymore. You never cared to ask me what I wanted, what I hoped for. You think that by bringing *tatay* here it'll make all the problems go away. We were doing fine without him. Have you ever considered asking me if I would be okay with it?" Her hands were placed against her hips, steadying herself as she continued. "Maybe if you told me about this before, this wouldn't be happening."

"How was I supposed to know?"

"By just talking to me! You know, I've always done my best to trust you. Whenever Mom asks if you're dating a girl, or if you lost your virginity, or if you're taking drugs, I don't say anything because I had this gut feeling that you would find your way to doing the right thing. But you never believe me! One time I screw up, and you shut me out from your life. I missed you, Vivian, and I've tried my best to make up for my past screw up. I tried opening myself up to you, but I'm always the bad guy to you. Now you bring him here, to our home, and ruin Christmas. You're supposed to be the big sister who protects me. Instead, you're coming back to hurt me. Did I somehow deserve this in your head?"

"No, you didn't. It's not like that. Look, I screwed up, and I'm sorry."

"You're sorry? That's all you have to say?" She shook her head. "I thought I got over it, but just seeing him here as if nothing happened... I can't accept him back."

"You don't have to. I'm not asking you to. I just wanted you to get the chance to talk to him and say everything you've kept inside to him." I approached my sister and took her hand into mine. It felt warm and delicate, as if I was holding a just-bloomed petal on a spring day. "You've been trying to keep our family together, but you have your own needs, too. I know how much *tatay* meant to you. I admit that I'm not the best when it comes to planning these things out and I wasn't sure if you were okay with this. But in the long term, I think you need this more than anyone."

I expected her to pull away and to yell at me, but she stood still. Her face crumpled, like a dam had broken from the other side of her cornea. I had forgotten how sensitive she was, something we both shared, and I pulled her into an embrace. She had trusted me to do the right thing. No one had ever put that much faith in me, and I didn't think Christina would still hold on to the notion that I was a trustworthy person. I had spent too long thinking she was an enemy when she was one of the few allies I had. Friends come and go, and so do lovers, but blood runs through thick and thin.

Christina was willing to at least have a word with Dad after that. She didn't tell me what she said to him, but she looked more relieved. I wondered if a burden had been unloaded from her shoulders after a decade of trying to be the knot for the family. She didn't fully forgive me for bringing him to our house, though, and we didn't speak until I was about to go back to Texas. She drove me back to SFO, but we decided to play Florence and the Machine songs instead of her usual Filipino playlist. We didn't talk too much besides the small conversations on what spring semester would be like for both of us and when the next time we'd see each other would be. Christina said she would consider visiting Texas during the break if she saved up enough money.

Once we arrived at the airport, we gave each other our final embrace before I went inside. There weren't any hard feelings from either of us, or at least not any that were bad like they used to be.

At the terminal, I finished checking in and waited at the lounge before my flight. My legs were kicked up on one of the lower tables, adjusting myself on the uncomfortable, metal chairs. I scrolled through my Facebook newsfeed, wondering if I missed anything from the lack of social media contact, when I saw Christina's profile picture. It was a scanned picture of us as kids, our faces covered in ice cream while we grinned into the camera. The caption: "Blood is thicker than water. *Mahal kita, Ate.*" I smiled as I pressed the "like" button and switched over to messages. I hesitated at first, but I nodded to myself as I typed out a message.

"I love you, too." ○



Winter Colors, Lydia Sweeney, Nikon D3300



Whirling Dervishes, Carley Chastain, Canon EOS Rebel T5

Third Trimester Micro Agression

Poetry by Za'Tasja Baker

He asks the woman to the left of you a question.
The pretty blonde responds,
Yes, this is my first child.

You know your poking belly makes you next in his line of curious investigation.

How many kids do you have?

You only stare in response.
Knowing this, too, will be your first-born.



DMV

Poetry by Sarah Pitts

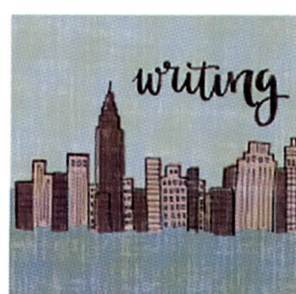
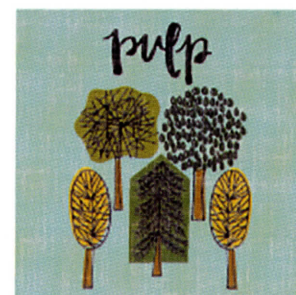
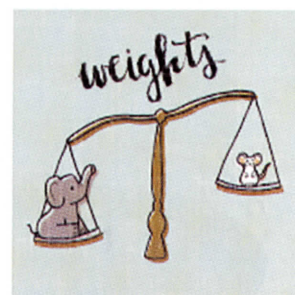
dead dreams of dispirited bureaucrats hang
themselves from water damaged ceiling tiles
beneath which empty-eyed citizens wait in line
but go nowhere

inaction enacts
in action
united we stand
untied we fall

The Space Between, Andrew Swindle, Nikon D810



1



SPRING into Graphic Design

2



1. Mohawk Paper Basics Booklet
Illustrations, Kaitlin McPheeters,
graphic design

2. Reflection, Jackson Glass, pencil

3. Children's Book Illustration,
Lydia Sweeney, colored pencil

3



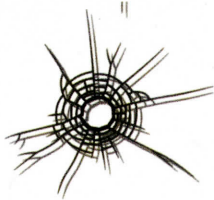


Bullet Holes in the Flag on the Back of a Jersey is Illegal

Poetry by Za'Tasja Baker

Empty your clip

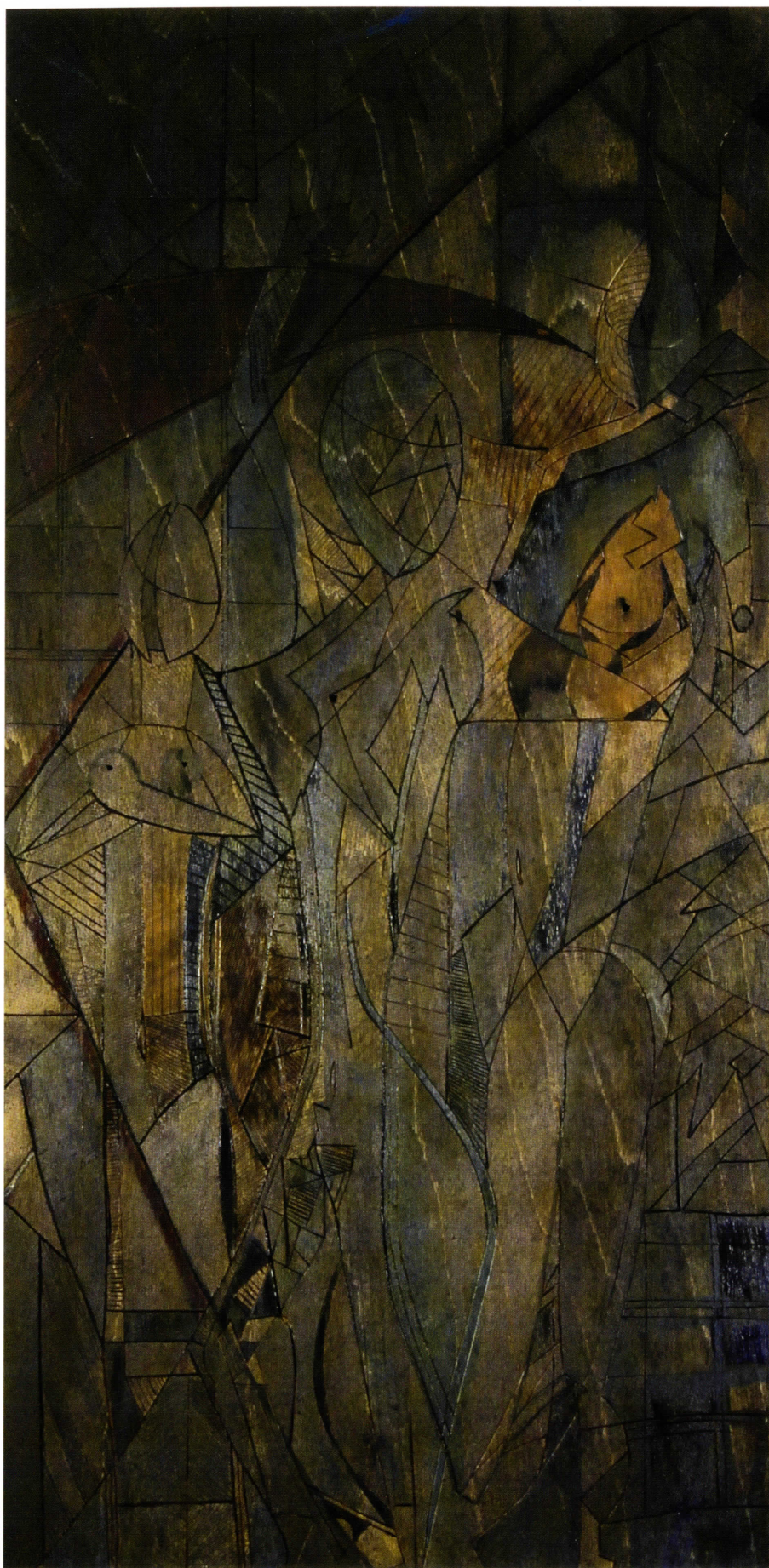
Two in the back
Right leg takes two or three
Left leg
 like the pig
gets by scot-free



The head takes a shiny souvenir
for the mortician to clear

It's snuggled on the shelf
right next to a framed flag

Bullet holes in the back of an American—
LEGAL



3 Figures, Kyle Ernest, ink and wood stain on wood

The Pines

Poetry by Leigh Ann Casey

I see the trees, they
grow throughout the land
between us.
The pines line
the rivers and the roads
that separate us
like a wall made of aging
wood and fallen pine needles.

You have been
inhaled by their greenery
and the haleness
of their bark.

They welcomed you
with broad, outstretched branches.
And you released
my hand to embrace them.



Sentry II, Shannon Bewley, cedar, resin, steel, electronics

How to Submit Your Work

At the beginning of each semester, *The Auburn Circle* takes submissions for that semester's publication. Submissions include art, interior design, graphic design, poetry, photography, fiction, nonfiction, fashion, architecture, and any other documentable form of literature or art. This school year we've started a better and faster online application process that will make life easier for all of us.

Please visit auburncircle.submittable.com or our website auburn.edu/circle/submissions for more information.

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